

Soviet Literature

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VICTOR NEKRASOV

STALINGRAD

PART II

(Concluded)¹

I don't remember such an autumn as that in all my life. September passed with clear blue skies, warm as May, with delightful sunrises and dreamy, violet sunsets. In the morning fish jumped in the Volga and the widening circles spread over the mirror-like surface. Belated cranes flew by through the skies, calling as they went. On the left bank the green of the foliage gave place to gold, and then to every shade of crimson and orange. At dawn, before our first artillery salvoes, the tints were as delicate as water colours, veiled in a transparent mist, calm, untroubled and spacious, with the dim bands of the distant forests faintly visible.

Slowly, reluctantly, the mists would lift. For some time longer a cool, milky scarf would hang over the river, and then melt into the transparent morning air.

Then, long before the sun's first rays, would come the first long-range gun, and the echo would roll over the drowsy river. Then the second, the third, the fourth, until at last all merged into the massive, majestic roar of the morning barrage.

And so the day begins. And with it. . .

Exactly at seven, so high that the eye could barely discern it, the first enemy reconnaissance plane flies overhead. Circling and circling up there, the cabin glass shines in the early rays as it veers. The engine roars and coughs with its characteristic, familiar sound, and then like some fantastic double-tailed fish, it sails back behind its own lines in the west.

This is the prologue.

After that come the "singers", or the "musicians", as we dub them—"Stukas", according to the Germans—like red-nosed birds, their talons reaching down for their prey. Sidewise in a zig-zag chain, they fly through the golden autumn sky amid AA shells, bursting in balls of fluff.

Rubbing our eyes, coughing from the first morning cigarette, we crawl out of our dug-out and screwing up our eyes, follow the flight of the first ten—this determines our day. By this we can judge which square figures in the German plans for the day, where the ground will heave and shake like a jelly, where the sun will be veiled in smoke and dust, on what sector the men will spend the night digging out the dead and burying them again, repairing damaged machine guns and cannon, digging new slit trenches

and dugouts to replace those that have been wiped out.

When the chain flies over our heads, we sigh with relief, throw off our shirts and wash, pouring water over each other from messtins. But when the leading machine turns over onto its wing before reaching us, then we pack into our foxholes cursing, and look at our watches—Jesus Christ, fourteen whole hours before evening!—and squinting, we count the bombs screaming at us from above. We know that each "singer" carries from eleven to eighteen bombs under its belly, that it does not drop them all at once but makes two or three flights, apportioning the dose psychologically, and that with the final flight the siren will scream fiercely, but the plane will drop only one bomb, or perhaps none at all, just sort of shaking its fist at us before going.

And so it goes on the whole day, until the sun sinks behind Mamayev Kurgan. Either for us, or for our neighbours. If not our neighbours, then us. If they do not bomb us, then they will attack. If they do not attack, then they will bomb.

Every now and then heavy Junkers and Heinkels would fly over. We knew them by their wings and engines. The Heinkels had rounded wings, the Junkers were chopped off square and the engines formed one line with the fuselage, like a comb. They would fly high, in wedge formation, and they would drop their light-coloured, heavy bombs lazily, here and there, not deigning to dive. That was why we detested those heavy Junkers—you never knew where their bombs would fall. And they always came flying from the direction of the blinding sun.

The whole day Messerschmidts roared through the air, racing up and down in couples over the bank, cannons spitting. Sometimes they would drop four little, well-aimed bombs—two from beneath each wing, or a long cigar-shaped box with anti-infantry grenades. The grenades would scatter, while the container turned over and over in mid-air. Later we would use it to wash our clothes in, the two halves made fine washtubs.

Staring upward till our necks ached, we would follow the air battles. I could never make out which planes were ours and which were German—tiny flecks whirling about madly, high up in the sky—how could anybody tell them apart? But Valega could always tell, he never made a mistake—he had a

¹ See *Soviet Literature* No. 10, 1946

hunter's eye, and could distinguish them at any height.

The wonderful weather continued, each day finer than the last—blue, cloudless skies, real summer. If only it would be cloudy, if only it would have rained sometimes. We hated those bright, sunny days, that luminous, blue space. We dreamed of mud, fog, rain, a grey autumn sky. But throughout the whole of September and October, only once did we sight a cloud. There was a great deal of talk about it, people held up wetted fingers and tried to guess where it was drifting, but the damned thing went off somewhere to the side, and the next day was still clear and sunny, filled with the roar of aircraft.

Only once, at the beginning of October, did the Germans give us a rest for two days—they must have been overhauling their equipment. There were no planes except the Messerschmidts. And when that happened, everybody took baths in the tubs and changed their clothes. Then it began all over again.

The Germans were trying to batter through to the Volga. Drunk and fiendish they were, their caps pushed to the back of their heads, their sleeves rolled up. People said that there were SS troops opposite us—Vikings or Death Heads, or something still worse. They yelled like demons, spattered us with tommy guns, fell back, and came on again. Twice they nearly drove us from the Metiz, but their tanks stuck in the scrap iron lying about the factory, and that saved us.

And so it went on—the devil alone knows for how long—five days, six, seven, or maybe it was eight days.

Then suddenly—silence. They were attacking to our right, battering the Red October Plant, both from the air and the ground. We watched it all, poking our heads over the edge of our foxholes. Splinters were flying, and those splinters were ten-ton iron piles, girders, lathes, machines, and boilers. For three days the angry yellowish-orange cloud of dust hanging over the factory never lifted. When a gust of wind came from the north it carried that cloud over us, and then we brought all the men out of the dugouts, for now the German front line was no longer visible, and the sons-of-bitches might take it into their heads to go for us under cover of the dust.

But in general things were quiet, with only the mortars firing, and our guns on the opposite bank. We sat in our dugouts smoking, cursing the Germans, aircraft and its inventors—"put those Wright brothers in the next foxhole and see what sort of song they'd sing"—and we tried to guess when the last chimneystack of the Red October would fall. Two days ago there had been six, yesterday three, and now just one was left—riddled, the top knocked off, but still standing defiantly.

And so September passed.

October had come.

2

"Marble" has phoned me to come to "thirty-one"... Major Borodin, the regimental commander, I have not seen him yet, he

is at headquarters, on the bank. A gun smashed his foot when he was landing, and he had not yet been up to the front line. All I know of him is that he has a deep, rumbling voice, and for some reason calls the Germans "Turks". "Hold tight, Kerzhentsev, hold tight," he booms through the telephone. "Don't let those Turks get the factory, put all your guts into it but don't give up." And we have put our guts into it and held on, held on and held on. Sometimes I cannot say myself why I am holding on—every day the number of my men grows less.

But now all that is past. We are having the third quiet day, resting. We have even taken our boots off at night... But how long would it last?

What was the use of guessing? I took Valega and went to the bank.

The major is lying in a tiny draughty dugout, the size of a henhouse. He is a kind, elderly man, with grey moustaches and a fatherly look about him. The kind of man that loves children, and that children love too, and the kind of man that stops to play with children and gives them rides on his knee.

He was wearing one jackboot and one galosh, sitting drinking tea and eating bread and garlic. He rumbled, cleared his throat and listened attentively to all I had to say, noisily sipping his tea from a big painted mug. With his good leg he pulled a chair nearer and held out his large, soft hand.

"So this is what you're like," he said. "And for some reason I'd been thinking that you were tall, with a bulldog face and massive shoulders." His voice was not so deep and vibrating as it had seemed through the telephone. "Have some tea?"

I accepted—it was a long time since I had had any real tea.

An orderly brought a teapot and another mug—just as large and bright as the major's. With a pocket knife he cut off a slice of lemon—my mouth watered. The major winked his little, deep-set eyes.

"See the way we're living. Not like you out there on the front line. Even got lemon here."

For some little time we drank our tea in silence, crunching pieces of sugar. Then the major turned his mug upside down, placed the tiny fragment of sugar that still remained upon it, in true peasant style to show that he'd had enough, and moving aside, carefully brushed the crumbs off the table.

"Well, how are things your way, eh, Battalion Commander?"

"Not so bad, Comrade Major, we're holding on for the present...."

"For the present?"

"For the present."

"And how long do you think 'for the present' will last?"

There was a new note in his voice, not nearly so fatherly.

"I think we shall hold on as long as we have men and munitions."

"Think." "For the present"... Those aren't the sort of words to use. Not for the army... You know what happened to the bird that thought a lot?"

"The turkey that got the chopper in the neck?"

"Yes, the turkey," and the corners of his eyes crinkled in a smile. "Smoke? Take one. They're Guards!"

He pushed a packet of cigarettes lying on the table towards me and looked at the picture on it. Under the name in red print ran red soldiers in helmets followed by red tanks, with red aircraft overhead.

"Well, and what about you, are you following this example? Are you doing any attacking? Eh?"

"We do more defending than attacking, Comrade Major."

The major smiled, then suddenly became very serious, and his soft, rather slack lips drew into a hard, straight line.

"How many men have you?"

"Thirty-six."

"Fighting men?"

"Yes, and besides that I've got telephonists, batmen, a commissary group on the bank, and six men on the other side with the horses. All in all, fifty. And there's the mortar gunners. That'll be seventy in all."

"Thirty-six and seventy. Interesting. Half and half. Not so good, that."

"I agree that it's not so good. I wanted to bring that six over with me, and give the horses to the field hospital, but your assistant forbade it—said that they'd have to go for hay."

The major chewed on the mouthpiece of his pipe. It was a large one, curved, and well chewed.

"You're an engineer by profession, eh?"

"An architect."

"Architect... Palaces, museums, theatres... That's it?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well, you can build me a palace. Our sapper's Lisagor... You haven't met him yet? I'll introduce you... He made me one palace, but Chuikov—commander—occupied it. And now I'm living in this rathole... shake off the earth from my collar after every bomb." The major's eyes crinkled into another smile. "Well, and of course you know mines and such-like, and barbed-wire spirals?"

"Yes, I know them."

"We'll deal with that in a minute. The battalion commanders are coming, we'll have a talk. And meanwhile, have a cigarette," he pushed the packet towards me.

"I've already applied for a battalion commander to replace you, but they haven't sent one. And with no engineer, it's like being without your right hand. Lisagor's a good chap, but when it comes to blueprints and plans, no damned use... There are men like that, you know."

A bomb exploded somewhere. We could not hear the sound, but there was an unpleasant sort of pressure on our eardrums, and the lamp flickered.

Then the battalion and other commanders arrived.

The meeting did not last long—about twenty minutes, no more. Borodin spoke, and we listened, looking at the map.

It appeared that the sector held by our division was the largest—about a kilo-

metre and a half in depth. To our left was a narrow strip along the very bank held by the 13th Guards, Rodimtsev's. It stretched almost up to the town, a narrow winding ribbon going as far as the wharf, nowher deeper than two hundred metres. To the right were the 39th Guards and the 45th. They were the ones getting it hot now. The red line of the front went along the white patch of the factory. To the right were two or three more divisions, and then—the end. That was all... All that was left on the bank. Five or six kilometres by one and half, and the one and a half was the widest part. In the centre of the town—the Germans. The map did not show the Tractor Works but they said that one more division had pushed in there, apparently Gorokhov's.

That night the 92nd brigade was to cross. It had already fought at Stalingrad and was returning after ten days' reforming. Its sector would be between Rodimtsev's Guards and ourselves. We would have to close up and vacate some space to our left. That would not be so bad.

But I would have to leave Metiz, the third battalion would take over there. I was to have the sector between Metiz and the eastern end of the S-shaped gulley on Mamayev Kurgan, the louisiest sector of the lot. Level and without trenches. All the approaches under fire. No question of connections with the bank by day. On my old sector the approaches had also been under fire, but there had been plenty of trenches and all kinds of cisterns and buildings. That had made communications easier.

Yes, Kandidi, the commander of the First Battalion was in luck, taking over with everything ready and in order... But as for me... The devil alone knew where I'd even find a place for headquarters. There'd be nothing like our nice little white cottage with its deep cellar.

The major talked slowly, calmly, almost growling, without taking his pipe from his mouth, moving his thumb with the short cut nail over the map.

"The job's simple—dig in, lay down barbed wire and hold on. A month, two, three—until further orders. Understand? We aren't strong enough to take the whole of Mamayev but what we have we mustn't give up."

The major raised his head from the map and turned his small deep-set eyes on me.

"Your job's the hardest, Kerzhentsev. The base of the promontory is in your hands. On the other side, the 45th Regiment. Those are the places where the Germans'll try to break through, to cut off our first battalion and two of the 45th at the same time. They're on Mamayev, too. And another thing—you won't get any more men, you've got to count on those you've got. There's only reinforcements for patching. And boys, at that...."

Taking his pipe from his mouth, he spat on the floor and rubbed out the spittle with his boot.

"How many seasoned men have you got left, Kerzhentsev?"

"Fifteen, not more. Ten of them are sailors."

"Not so bad. Sinitsin and Kandidi haven't that many. Those are your backbone. Re-

member that and don't sacrifice any of them needlessly. Got any spades?"

"We're pretty low, when the division left after reforming, it didn't get its engineering equipment. And what they got in the villages on the way are rusty and no damn good—broke the first time they were used, and there're no pickaxes at all. Every day we've been expecting equipment, but it's got stuck somewhere or another on the other side and we scratch with any old stuff we find in the ruins."

"Push on the trenches first. Until you get sappers' tools, you'll have to use infantry trenching tools—nothing else to be done. Sinitsin, if I remember, you've got more of them than the others, and your sector's easier. Give Kerzhentsev half of them. Carry on."

He rose to show that there was nothing for us to hang about for. As it was we'd filled the place with smoke.

3

The sun is dazzling. The bank is as busy as an ant hill. Men are dragging things, digging, building. A field kitchen clinging to the steep side is smoking, washing is hanging out to dry—somebody's shirts and socks. A hill of brass shells gleam in the sun—small, medium, large, with red, blue and yellow caps. There are cases of cartridges. Sacks. More cases. A mutilated gun without a barrel. A disabled Katyusha. The floated carcass of a horse with the hind leg blown away and a swarm of flies buzzing round it.

To the left, a half-sunken barge, with only the ribs visible. The hull has been ripped off for firewood. Perched high up on the ribs like roosting hens, four men are washing their shirts, shouting, splashing, their backs wet and shining.

The sky is a brilliant blue, without a single cloud in it. A snow-white church with its green cupola peeps out from the golden autumn foliage on the opposite bank. There are crowds there too, scurrying about and crawling to and fro on the sun-bleached sand. Every now and then mortar shells explode silently and descend like a bouquet of slowly opening flowers. The noise comes later. Men chatter, and after a few minutes begin crawling and scurrying about again.

A small sloop looking like a water-beetle is floundering by the shore. The current is strong and carries it away to the right. Again and again the oars rise and fall rapidly.

"They'll start firing in a minute," says Lisagor, taking a tooth-powder box from his pocket and rolling himself a cigarette. In a couple of minutes a white fountain, like a geyser, leaps up from the water.

"The dopes, rowing straight across," says Lisagor again, licking his cigarette. "They'll only exhaust themselves and make it easier for the Germans. They should go with the current and make them alter their range all the time."

"If they go with the current, they'll find themselves right in Jerry's hands," says somebody behind me. The sappers are also watching the boat, leaning on their spades.

The fountains increase. The oars of the boat swing indefatigably.

"Bad gunners," says a thin, narrow-chested soldier beside me. "Yesterday they made matchwood of three boats."

"Yesterday the boat was five times as big," somebody else replied in a slow, hoarse bass. "And it was so heavily loaded, it could hardly move."

One mortar shell bursts right beside the boat. The boat is tossed and the oars are still for a few seconds. The oarsmen must have bent down.

"That isn't one of ours? Eh? Korobkov's? Sent them two hours ago."

"May be ours . . . how can you tell. Ours had four oars too."

"The Korobkov boat's been drying on the bank for an hour. And Korobkov's isn't a sloop, it's a flat-bottomed boat. . . Fine sailor you are."

"Machine guns'll be starting now," Lisagor says quietly, inhaling smoke and blowing rings. "Mow them down, easy as drinking a glass of water."

And almost at once a lot of tiny fountains spring up about the boat, so thick and close together that they merge with one another.

Everybody is silent. The oars cease to move.

"The swine," somebody bursts out behind me. "They'll sink them. . . ."

Almost everybody on the bank and round about us is watching the boat. Again the oars begin to move. But only two of them now, instead of four. Evidently somebody is killed or wounded.

The sloop has reached the middle of the river, and is now directly opposite us. Again the mortar fire begins.

"Another fifty metres, and Jerry won't be able to see them. . . ."

"Pile it on heavy, boys!"

Shells burst all round. It is inconceivable that the boat can still be whole. It is true that it got tossed about, and soon the fountains are left behind.

Somebody on our bank shouts at the top of his voice:

"Come on, come on, come on . . ." and waves his cap.

Suddenly, as though on a word of command, the fountains disappear. Two or three more shells splash into the water, but the boat is already far away. The men scatter, cursing with relief.

Lisagor tosses away his cigarette butt.

"And so that's how they bring over our food and munitions. You saw it?"

There was only one crossing for the whole right bank—the sixty-second—two motor boats with barges. At most they could make six trips during the night, or with an extra effort seven, and what was that for the eight or ten divisions on this bank—a mere drop in the ocean. . . The only way out of it was for them to get their own supplies over.

"Our regiment's got a whole flotilla," says Lisagor. "Five sloops, three flat-bottomed boats and a pontoon. There were fifteen, but a number of them are out of commission now. Old. Leaky. And riddled with splinters. The pontoon's like a sieve. I always have three of my boats being patched up."

During the night we moved to our new positions. I was hurrying to get there before midnight, when the moon would rise, but the Germans set fire to two sheds, and my whole sector was as bright as day. That dragged out the transfer for nearly the whole night. A machine gun under the bridge kept firing almost without a break. I could see I'd have a lot of trouble with that machine gun, it flayed the whole of my path. Towards morning another gun started off. And we had nothing to answer with—our ammunition would barely last the day. So I made my way as best I could, covering my men with the company mortars. There were no shells for the 82. I asked for support from our regimental artillery, but they must have been short of ammunition too—in all they only fired three times during the night.

It was a lousy sector, cut in two by a high railway embankment, winding round the foot of the Mamayev Kurgan, with trucks standing on it. The right flank was barely visible from the left, only the upper part of the gully. No trenches. The first battalion, which we were relieving, had dug in in some sort of depressions and shell holes, covering themselves with all the odd bits of iron scrap that were lying there. On the other side of the embankment there were some sort of trenches along the gully, but without any sign of communication trenches.

This was very different from Metiz. There I had been able to go from one end to the other practically without stooping.

The sector itself was not a large one for an ordinary battalion—about six hundred metres—but I had only thirty-six men. I had begun with four hundred, and now there were thirty-six. And that damned embankment cut the sector into two unequal parts—the right flank, on the Kurgan, was twice as long as the left. But I had two companies of eighteen men—actually two groups. Plus two company commanders and three platoon commanders. I'm not counting the machine gunners and mortar gunners. Try and direct them all without any communication trenches. During the day, each man became a separate firing point, cut off from all the others. And along the whole length and breadth, the Germans had the range.

I looked for a headquarters, even a temporary one, so as to set up a telephone. Nothing but ruins, burned-out sheds, and not even a sign of a cellar. Valega saved the situation, he found a well camouflaged pipe under the embankment—reinforced concrete. But it was already occupied by some artillerymen. I was met by an aggressive lanky lieutenant with a stubble on his chin, each hair leading a life of its own.

"You can't come in and that's all there is to it. . . There are five of us here as it is, and you want to push in a whole headquarters."

But I was not in the mood for diplomatic negotiations. I gave orders to set up the telephone, and told the senior adjutant to make out a report.

"We'll settle here, and that's that. . . And don't move till I give the order."

That was all the telephonists needed. Unrolling their wires, they settled down right on the stone floor and began calling up some of their "Forget-me-nots" and "Tulips".

Kharlamov, the senior adjutant, a short-sighted man who was always mislaying everything, had of course lost the most important folder, and was fussing about, getting under our feet and in everybody's way.

"I must have left it at the old headquarters," he growled under his breath, looking about confusedly.

It was amazing the way that man was forever forgetting something wherever he went. In the time I had known him he had already managed to lose a greatcoat, three helmets and his own wallet, to say nothing of pencils and pens.

At five o'clock the company commanders arrived.

"Well, how's things?" I asked.

Karnaukhov, who had taken over Company 2 after Petrov was killed, shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Got fixed for the present. The machine guns are all right, but the men. . . We'll have to manage somehow for the day—it's getting light already—and then during the night we'll get busy with spades. . . Can't hold out long in trenches like these."

Karnaukhov had a deep voice that sounded rather muffled. He had a hesitating manner of speech—perhaps he was choosing his words. In general, I liked him.

He had come ten days previously—tall, awkward, with grey eyes and thick brows meeting over the bridge of his nose, carrying a kitbag on his shoulder. With some difficulty he edged in through the low doorway.

We were just having dinner—soup made with dehydrated potatoes and some rusks. He refused dinner, but asked for a drink drained a big mug of water, that was almost the size of a bucket, with the greatest enjoyment, wiped his lips and smiled.

"I must have swilled down all your water supply, I guess. . ." Then he asked where his company was.

"Sit down and rest a bit first."

He smiled again, almost apologetically and with the palm of his hand wiped off his wet forehead, where his cap had left a red mark.

"Been resting in hospital for a whole month I even put on three kilograms. But they didn't give me any tobacco when I left and you know what that means. . ."

I handed him my pouch, he rolled himself a big fat cigarette and smoked in silence.

I asked him the usual questions and he replied quietly, briefly, sitting on his kitbag in the corner. Then he rose, looked for some where to throw his cigarette butt, and not finding an ashtray, tossed it out through the doorway.

"Well? Who'll show me the way?"

In the evening I received a neatly drawn up report with firing instructions for every machine gun and a plan of the enemy's firing points as well.

The next day he got back a section of trench that the Germans had taken from us, losing only one man. When I went to his dugout in the evening I found it very unlike the

front—neat and tidy, with mirror, shaving things and a toothbrush on a shelf. He himself was sitting writing something in an exercise book spread out on his knees.

"Writing home?"

"No . . . just . . . nothing much . . ." he said in embarrassment, trying to get up, ducking his head, his shoulders hunched against the ceiling, hurriedly stuffing the exercise book into his pocket.

"It's poetry, I suppose," I thought to myself and asked him no more about it.

That night his company grabbed a machine gun and six cases of ammunition from the Germans. The men said that it was he who had gone for the machine gun, but when I asked him, he only smiled, and avoiding my eyes, said that that was just a tale, that he would never do such a thing and that company commanders didn't go out after machine guns.

Now as he was standing before me, unshaved, slightly stooping, I knew very well that the thing he wanted to do most in all the world, just like me, was to sleep. But first, he would make out a plan of his defenses, sitting with the tip of his tongue sticking out between his teeth, or else he would go off to see if supper had been brought for the men.

Farber, of Company Five, was sitting on the corner of a cartridge box, weary, with his usual absent-minded indifference, staring fixedly at one point, his thick glasses shining. His eyes were swollen from lack of sleep and his cheeks, which had always been thin, were now quite sunken.

All this time I had never been able to get him out of his shell. It was as though nothing in the world interested him. He was extremely short-sighted, tall, round-shouldered, with one shoulder higher than the other and an unhealthy pallor on his face. He hardly talked to anybody. Before the war he had been a post-graduate student of the mathematical faculty of the Moscow University—I had learned that from his papers, for he never talked about it. In general, he never talked about anything.

Several times I had tried to draw him into conversation about the past, the present, the future, had tried to stir him and waken some kind of recollections. He would listen almost silently, only occasionally throwing in a word, but it went no further. Everything seemed to pass him by, leaving him unmoved. I never saw him smile, I never even saw what his teeth looked like.

The sense of curiosity, like that of fear, seemed to have atrophied in him. Once when we were still at Metiz I met him in one of the trenches. He was standing, leaning against the breastwork with his short greatcoat up to the knees, his back to the enemy, absent-mindedly scratching the crumbling earthen side of the trench with his boot. Two or three bullets snicked past fairly close, then a mortar shell exploded. He still stood there, scratching at the soil.

"What are you doing here, Farber?"

Slowly, almost reluctantly, he turned, and his eyes with their colourless lashes and heavy, slightly swollen lids, rested on me enquiringly.

"Nothing in particular. . . ."

"If you stand around Jerry'll get you here in a jiffy."

"Possible. . . ." he agreed calmly, and squatted on his heels.

It would be hard to say that he was untidy—he was always shaven and his collar was always clean, but that was probably a matter of habit or training, for he attached no importance whatsoever to his appearance. His greatcoat was two sizes too small, with the belt at the back up under his shoulder blades, his feet were wrapped in rags, the top of his cap was threadbare, and he had no badges.

Once I said to him: "Why don't you stitch on your badges, Farber?"

He looked at me with his usual surprise.

"To give me more authority?"

"It's simply army regulations to wear your badges."

He rose silently and left. The next day I saw two badges sewn crookedly onto the collar of his greatcoat with white thread.

"Your batman's not much good, Farber, he's made a bad job of your badges."

"I haven't got a batman. I sewed them on myself."

"Why haven't you?"

"The company's got eighteen men instead of a hundred and fifty."

"Well, let one of them be your batman in his spare time."

"Isn't it an unnecessary luxury?"

"It's not unnecessary and not a luxury. You're company commander."

He did not argue. In general, he never argued and never became angry, but I had a very good idea that even after that he still had no batman.

He was a queer fellow. I always felt a certain strain when I was with him, and for that reason I never kept him by me. Got your orders and goodbye—carry them out. Silently, absent-mindedly, he would listen to them, looking away somewhere to the side, nod or say: "I'll try," and go. Now he was sitting there indifferently, stooping, his bony white hands poking out of his too-short sleeves, drumming on the table.

"Remember, Farber," I told him, "your sector's a dirty one. Don't count on much help from the artillery. Everything depends on the machine guns. Don't try direct frontal fire, all you'll get out of it is noise."

He nodded silently, still drumming on the table monotonously with his long fingers.

Through the cracks I could see that it was getting quite light. I dismissed the company commanders, and rang up headquarters to say that the transfer was complete and I was sending the papers with a runner.

5

In the evening I sent all the men not in the line to fetch mines. A good thing I had a cart, in the darkness it could bring them almost up to the embankment. Risky, of course, but it could be done. And from there it wasn't so bad to carry them.

By ten I had about three hundred of them, piled up by the pipe. At that time the sappers arrived, three soldiers and a sergeant,

the same whiskered Garkusha. They sat down in a corner cracking sunflower seeds, occasionally throwing out a word or two to each other. They looked tired out.

"Been digging in the tunnel all day long, and back again tomorrow. Our backs and arms are numb."

Garkusha held out his hand—hard, horny, as though callouses covered the whole of it.

The men cracked their seeds in silence, with earnest concentration, staring ahead of them.

When the fourth company reported that they had a hundred mines, Garkusha rose, and shook the shells from his knees.

"Well, what about it? Come on before the moon gets up. Who'll guide us?"

Hanging on to the bushes and the dry, prickly grass, we descended to the very front line. Two- and three-metre slit trenches lay just in the middle of the slope.

I immediately gave orders to bring the men up higher, and dig in there. Those trenches weren't worth a cent anyway. Let two or three men stop here on guard.

Gasping and cursing under their breath, the men crawled up, dragging spades, sacks and greatcoats. A good thing there was no moon, or a good half would have been lost.

I descended still further. The slope was a steep one, and the soil was hard, the clay, already beginning to freeze, was slippery underfoot. Each of the sappers was dragging twenty mines in a sack. From time to time a German machine gun would fire a round—the one at the head of the gully. But the bullets flew high, spitting over our heads. They were explosive bullets.

We dragged ourselves through some mud—evidently a stream, for there had been no rain for a long time. It gurgled underfoot. Then a rocket flared up, and we plumped down on our faces right into the cold, clammy mud. Peering out of the corner of my eye, from behind the shelter of my elbow, I watched the blinding, quivering stars sail through the velvety sky.

"Well, where shall it be?"

Leaning his shoulder on me, the sergeant was breathing right into my ear. After the brightness of the rocket, the darkness was intense. I could not even see his face, only feel his warm breath, with the smell of sunflower seeds.

"As soon as the next rocket goes up, look to your left..." my voice was trembling with the strain. "You'll see an iron tank... Begin from there... And fifty metres to the right... in three rows—checkerboard pattern... As we agreed."

I articulated the words with difficulty, it was as though I were forcing them out one by one.

Garkusha made no reply, but crawled away to the side. I could hear him, but I could see nothing. In a minute I felt his breath on my face again.

"Comrade Lieutenant...."

"Well?"

"I'll go a little higher, or the water'll freeze and then...."

Another rocket. Garkusha flopped down right on top of me. My face was pressed into the ground, I held my breath. Mouth, nose

and ears were filled with water and mud. Then the rocket died out. I raised my head and said.

"Very good."

I was already easy in my mind about the mine field.

I wiped my face with my sleeve.

A foul job, the sappers! Darkness, mud, the Germans thirty paces away, and your own somewhere up above... And a hole to be dug for every mine, detonators to be put in—kind of tube with a spring, sharp as a nail, and the capsule—test everything, put it into the hole, cover it with earth and camouflage it... And all the time listening—are the Germans coming?—and wallowing in mud, and freezing with every rocket....

I could hear the men cautiously taking the mines out of the sacks.

They should be ready in an hour.

As for me, better begin with the report and map of the mine field while it's fresh in my mind, though I'm sick of this writing every night. Three copies, and a plan with bearings and conventional signs and no forms—all to be done myself, by hand.

I clambered up the hill, nearly losing my footing a couple of times. Not a thing to be seen. My hands were scratched all over from some thorns—briars, most probably.

The men were digging in silence, all I could hear was the dull thud of spades. Somebody quite near me, invisible in the darkness, was hoarsely cursing the hard, stoney earth, under his breath, like a stubborn horse.

"If they'd send us a couple of picks from the battalion... Call this a spade... Good to cut butter with...."

Picks... picks... The devil alone knows where I can get them... What wouldn't I give for a couple of dozen picks! I felt I'd never in all my life longed for anything as I longed for some picks at this moment.

Just after midnight an orange moon appeared from somewhere on the Volga side. It peeped over the edge of the gully. In half an hour it would be impossible to work any more there. And there were only four men, and a hundred mines.

The moon keeps crawling up and up, it turns yellow, then white. It cared for nothing. It even seemed to be moving faster than usual, just as though it were in a hurry to get some where, or had been late in starting. And just as though for spite, the German side was in the shadow, while every minute ours became lighter, lighter... Slowly, as though reluctantly, the last remnants of shadow retreated, crawling down the hill, leaving the bushes clinging to the bottom, one after the other.

Somebody was asking for me. A young voice, almost a boy's, with a break in it. Karnaukhov's runner, apparently.

"The lieutenant, the battalion commander, haven't you seen him?"

"Which one's that? The one with the binoculars?" a voice replies from somewhere below, probably from a slit trench.

"No, not that one. The battalion commander, the man in a blue cap."

"Eh... in a blue cap?... Well, now, if you'd said that to begin with, that he's a blue cap... But you wi' yer battalion com-

mander. . . How can you remember all the officers in one day?"

"Well, where is he?"

"I dunno," a kindly voice replied. "He hasn't been this way. Honest to God. I dunno where he is. . . ."

"You bloody fool. . . ."

"Maybe Fesenko knows. . . Fesenko, eh, Fesenko. . . ."

I moved towards the voices. From another trench, Fesenko in a voice that was just as slow and kindly replied that "there's been officers here, and the company commander came and told me to dig and not just pretend to. . . God knows where he went. . . ."

"Who's asking for me?"

"Is that you, Comrade Lieutenant?" and a small, thin figure jumped to attention in front of me.

"It's me. . . Don't stand to attention, lie down!"

The figure squatted.

"Well? What's the matter?"

"Headquarters phoned for you to come at once."

"Me? At once? Who phoned?"

"I don't know. . . There's some colonel there."

"What colonel, where had he sprung from?" I couldn't make head or tail of it.

"And he said to come at once, be there in three minutes. . . ."

Before I got to Karnaukhov's cellar, I bumped into Valega. He was running, head down, panting.

"The colonel's waiting for you. The divisional commander, I think. . . With an Order. . . And somebody else with him. . . Kharlamov, junior lieutenant, he's got something all mixed up there. And they're angry. . . ."

Kharlamov again, damn him. Like an Old-Man-of-the-Sea on my back. And they call him a senior adjutant, chief of staff. . . Ought to be in the kitchen, not at headquarters.

The Germans suddenly started firing, and for a good fifteen minutes we lay with our noses pressed to the earth.

6

The colonel was sitting, supporting his arms on the table. He was small and weakly, like a boy, whose hollow cheeks were deliberately drawn tight, with vertical lines between his brows. The gold buttons of his greatcoat were unfastened. Beside him was our own major, a stick between his knees. There were two others, as well.

Kharlamov stood to attention, buttoned up and smart. I never saw him looking like that before. He was blinking.

I brought my hand to my cap and reported—the battalion entrenching, laying mines. Two large, black, staring eyes were fixed on me from a thin, consumptive-looking face. Dry, thin fingers tapped the table.

Nobody spoke.

I lowered my hand.

The pause lengthened. I could hear Valega panting behind me.

The black eyes became smaller, narrowed

to a thread, while a hint of a smile played round his lips.

"What's the matter? Been fighting somebody?"

I said nothing.

"Give him a mirror. Let him admire himself."

Somebody gave me a thick piece of glass that was peeling. I barely recognized myself. Nothing was visible beyond the eyes. Arms, quilted jacket, boots—all thick with mud.

"Well, that'll do," laughed the colonel, and his laughter was unexpectedly young and gay. "All sorts of things can happen. . . I once reported to the regional commander in shorts, and nothing happened, only I got ten days for saluting without a head-dress."

The smile disappeared as though it had been wiped off. His large black eyes were fixed on me again—wise, rather tired eyes, with bags under them.

"Well, Battalion Commander, tell me what you've accomplished in these twenty-four hours. If it looks the same here at the front as it does on paper, I don't envy you."

"We've done very little, Comrade Colonel."

"Little? Why?"

He never batted an eyelash.

"Very few men and not enough tools."

"How many men have you?"

"Thirty-six fighting men."

"And idlers, runners and so on?"

"About seventy in all."

"Do you know how many the 43rd regiment has? Fifteen to twenty to a battalion, and they're fighting all right."

"I'm also fighting, Comrade Colonel."

"He held Metiz, Comrade Colonel," the major thrust in. "We transferred him to this sector last night."

"Don't try to excuse him, Borodin. It's not Metiz he's holding now, and it's not from Metiz that the Germans'll try to drive him. . . . Then turning to me again: "Got trenches?"

"They're being dug, Comrade Colonel."

"Well, show me. . . ."

I had no time to reply. He was already standing by the door, fastening his buttons with swift, nervous movements.

I tried to say that there was heavy firing there, that it would be better if he. . . .

"Don't try to teach me my business. I know it."

Borodin also rose, leaning heavily on his stick.

"No sense in your coming with us. Lose your other leg, and what'll I do then? Come along, Battalion Commander."

We could hardly keep up with him—Valega, the adjutant, a young fellow with a round, flattish face, and myself. With short steps, not in the least military, and swaying slightly, he walked swiftly and confidently, as though he had often been there before.

I halted at Karnaukhov's cellar. The colonel turned round impatiently.

"Well, what are you stopping for?"

"The company headquarters is here."

"All right, let it stop here. . . Where are the trenches?"

"Further on. Beyond those pipes."

"Show me the way."

The trenches—were plainly visible now—both ours and the Germans'. The moon was

shedding a bright light over everything.

"Lie down."

We lay down, the colonel beside me, supporting his head on his hands. I explained where the trenches had been before and where I was digging them now. He made no reply. Then he asked where the machine guns were. I showed them. Where were the mortars? I showed them. He was silent, every now and then trying to stifle a cough.

"And where are you placing the mines?"

"Over there, to the left, in the gulley."

"Cease work. Get your men back."

I couldn't understand.

"You heard what I said? Get your men back. . . ."

I sent Valega down with the order to mark the right flank with a peg and return. Silently, on his stomach, Valega slipped down.

Silence. We could hear the heavy breathing of the men digging. Somewhere beyond Mamayev Kurgan a six-barrelled mortar grated, setting our teeth on edge, and six shells with red tails, like comets, sailed leisurely over our heads and burst with a deafening crash somewhere behind us, near the Meat Packing Plant. We even felt the concussion. The colonel never raised his head. He coughed.

"Can you see his machine guns? On the mound?"

"Yes. I see them."

"How do you like them?"

"Not at all."

"I don't like them either."

A pause. I couldn't make out what he was driving at.

"I don't like them at all, Battalion Commander. . . Not at all."

I said nothing. I didn't like them either, but I had no artillery. What could I use to silence them?

"Well. . . See that you're over there tomorrow."

"There. . . where?"

"Where those machine guns are. Understand?"

"I understand," I replied, though I most certainly did not understand how I was to get there.

Bracing his hands on the ground, the colonel jumped up as lightly as a boy.

"Let's go."

Just as swiftly and lightly he moved back through the debris, never stumbling, never grasping anything. At headquarters he lighted a thick, aromatic cigarette, a "Nasha Marka", leafed through *Martin Eden* which was lying on the table, glanced at the ending and frowned in distaste.

"A fool. . . a real fool."

Then raising his eyes to my face, he asked:

"Yours?"

"It belongs to the commander of Company 4."

"Read it?"

"No time, Comrade Colonel."

"Read it and give it to me. I read it some time ago, but I've forgotten it. I only remember what a determined fellow he was. Only the end's no good. A bad ending. Eh, Borodin?"

A rather embarrassed smile curved Borodin's full heavy lips,

"I don't remember. . . It's a long time since I read it, Comrade Colonel."

"Don't spin those yarns. You haven't read it at all. Take it after me. I'll probably finish it by New Year. And then I'll examine you on it. . . You can learn a lot from that Martin. . . A stubborn, persistent fellow. . . ."

Slamming the book, he looked at me. He was evidently considering something, a series of wrinkles appeared on the bridge of his nose.

"We shan't have any preliminary barrage. As soon as it gets dark, send out patrols. Your lads seem a good lot," he turned his head slightly towards the major.

"Good fighters, Comrade Colonel."

"Well, then. Send out patrols as soon as it gets dark. Then—what time does the moon rise?"

"Just after midnight."

"Just after twelve. Good. At half past eleven we'll start off with the 'corn-hoppers'". Chuikov promised me them if I needed them. At eleven—the attack. Clear?"

"Quite clear." My tone was not very confident.

"No 'hurrah', not a sound. Crawling, flat. Only a surprise can do it. You understand? You can give the men a tot—a hundred or a hundred and fifty grams. . . Still got the sailors?"

"Yes—ten of them."

"Well, then you'll take it."

And again that faint shadow of a smile crossed his thin, colourless lips.

I certainly could not see how I, with thirty-six men, no, and not even thirty-six, twenty at the most, could attack a height defended by three machine guns, not to speak of those that could come to their assistance, and most certainly mined. And taking it was only the beginning—I'd have to hold it. But I said nothing, and stood silently, thumbs to trouser seams. Rather sink through the earth, than. . . .

"We'll send you ten more men from the bank, Borodin—some of those tailors and bootmakers and others lounging around. Let them have a taste of it. You can send them back later. . . ."

The major nodded his large head silently, chewing at his bubbling, spitting pipe. The colonel drummed on the table with his bony fingers. He looked at his watch—it seemed impossibly large on his thin, dry wrist. It showed a quarter past two. With a sharp, abrupt movement he rose.

"Well, Battalion Commander. . . and he held out his hand. "Kerzhentsev's your name, I think?"

"Kerzhentsev."

His hand was hot and dry.

At the door he turned again.

"And that book—what's its name—about the man who drowned himself at the end. . . don't give it to anybody. . . If you don't bring it to me I'll come to the mound and take it."

The major followed him out, clapping me lightly on the shoulder.

"He's a Tatar, our divisional command-

¹ Aircraft small enough to be concealed in standing maize, otherwise called U-2.

der. A cleyer son-of-a-bitch . . ." and smiled at his not very polite expression. "Come to me in the morning—we'll have to put our heads together."

The sappers returned, carrying something clumsy and heavy. Garkusha wiped his forehead, breathing heavily.

"Boyajiev's wounded," and he sank down heavily onto the pallet. "Jaw torn off."

The men panting silently, seated the wounded man on the opposite pallet. He slumped onto it lifelessly, his arms falling limply onto his knees, with his head bent low. It was wound round with something red. Chest, arms, trousers were saturated with blood.

"On our way back . . . spotted us . . . They began with mortars. Koltsov's killed . . . Not even a trace of him left. And him you see, his jaw's gone."

The wounded man was groaning and rolling his head. By this time there was a small pool of blood at his feet. Marusya took off the bandages and through her swiftly flashing hands we could see his forehead with a lock of damp hair clinging to it, a nose, eyes and cheeks. Below that—nothing . . . black and red. And he kept groaning, groaning, groaning. . . .

"The best man we had," said Garkusha wearily. His cap had fallen off and was left lying there on the floor. "Planted fifty today. And not a word. . . ."

Then, after a moment's pause:

"Then we laid them all for nothing?"

I didn't even answer.

The most awful thing about war is that so much is done for nothing. And it can't be helped. . . .

The wounded man was led away.

The sappers finished their cigarettes and also left.

It was a long time before I could get to sleep.

7

Since morning for some reason or other everything had got on my nerves—must have got out of bed the wrong side. A flea had got inside my puttees and I could not get rid of it. Kharlamov had lost another document and stood there in front of me blinking his black Armenian-looking eyes, spreading out his hands—"I put it in the drawer and now it's gone. . . ." And I was sick of soup made from mouldy millet—every day, morning and evening, morning and evening. And my tobacco was damp and wouldn't draw. And there had been no Moscow papers for three days. And they'd sent me eight cripples from the river bank—the blind and the halt.

Everything got on my nerves. . . .

Farber had lost two men from a direct hit on a pillbox. I had told him to cover it with rails—there was a whole stack of them lying at Metiz—but he'd dilly-dallied till he lost his men. Even shouted at him and when he turned silently to go, made him return to repeat the order.

Browned off. . . .

Sent Kharlamov to the bank for some forms which I did not need, just to get him out of my sight.

I lay on my pallet. For some reason or other my head was aching. In the corner a telephonist was reading a thick book that had been battered about.

"Give that to me! D'ye think you're here to read?"

I took the book from him. *Sevastopol*—Vol. III, the beginning and the end of it had been torn off, for cigarette paper probably. I opened it at random.

" . . . The losses in the regiment had been heavy, while replacements, when there were any, were infinitesimal, so that the very terms—regiment, battalion, company, had lost their usual meaning.

"In a line regiment like the Volynian, for instance, there were no more than a thousand men left out of four thousand; all the regiments of the Eleventh Division—the Kamchatka, the Hunters, the Selengensk, the Yakutsk—like those of the Sixteenth—the Vladimir, the Suzdal, the Uglich and the Kazan—had no more than a thousand and a half each. . . ."

Fifteen hundred . . . a thousand. . . And us? I had no more than eighty men in the battalion, and there were three battalions to the regiment—that made two hundred and forty at the most. Plus artillery, chemists, telephonists and scouts—another hundred. Three hundred and fifty in all. Well, four hundred. . . Well, five hundred. . . And the divisional commander had said that in other regiments there were still less. And how many of them combatants? Not more than a third. What if the Germans got tired of battering the Red October? If they turned their attention to us again? Sent tanks against Farber? Of course, the embankment would hinder them there. But they could easily come under the bridge, where they had their machine gun and cannon. . . What would I do then? Sixteen men sitting in their foxholes. No mines. Borodin said we'd have them in three days—being unloaded somewhere. . . Assuming that was so—it would take three more nights to lay them. Five days waiting and saying our prayers. . . .

" . . . Things were liveliest with the restaurant keepers, who had just set up their roomy tents in a row. Now, after the storm, these were visited by the officers who came to the town, from the bastion, to enjoy themselves a bit. . . In these hospitable tents, which held both a buffet and a good assortment of wines, vodka, refreshments, a dozen tables for guests, and even a kitchen hidden behind the buffet, they ate, drank, joked and laughed gaily. . . ."

A kitchen hidden behind the buffet. . . A dozen tables for guests. . . .

I threw the book aside, drew my greatcoat up over my head and tried to sleep.

The telephonist was fussing about and clearing his throat in the corner. The wall clock was ticking away unevenly—Valega had scrounged it somewhere—a little blue one, with hands cut out of an old tin can.

I longed for a pork cutlet dipped in bread crumbs, with crisp French fried potatoes, thin and crackling. . . The last time I'd eaten pork. . . The devil alone knew, I couldn't remember. Was it in Kiev? Or somewhere

in the army... though no; that hadn't been pork, that was just fried beef....

I turned over onto the other side. The light from the smoky lamp made my eyes smart....

At half past ten the "corn-hopper" would come. At eleven I was to launch the attack. A little after twelve, the moon would rise. That meant that I would have about an hour and a quarter. In that time I must go down into the gully, climb the opposite side, drive out the Germans and then dig in. But if the "corn-hopper" was late? Or suppose there wasn't one, but two or three? I remembered that the Divisional Commander had said "corn-hoppers", and not "corn-hopper".... What a fool I was, not to have asked how many there would be. The first would drop its bombs, I'd come out, and then the second would arrive. But I'd have to attack directly after the bombing, before the Germans got their wits back.... I'd have to ring up the major, get him to find out from the Divisional Commander....

What piercing black eyes he had, that Divisional Commander. It was difficult to meet his gaze for long.

They said that in the summer, somewhere near Kostroma, he had led his division out of an encirclement, rifle in hand, himself in the front rank.

The plucky devil!

And the way he strolled along the front line. Neither bullets nor shells—nothing mattered to him. What was that, anyway—an example, showing the young 'uns? They said that Napoleon had been afraid of nothing, too. Arkol Bridge, plague hospitals.... When he was buried they found scars on him that nobody had known about.

But what is bravery? I don't believe those men who say they're not afraid of bombing. They're afraid all right, but they know how to hide it. There's no other kind. I remember Maximov saying: "There aren't any people who are afraid of nothing. Everybody's afraid. Only some lose their heads, and with others it's just the opposite—every fiber of their body is alive and their brains work more clearly and precisely than usual. Those are the brave men."

That was just what Maximov himself had been like. Had been.... And now he was probably no longer alive. The most fearful moments had not been fearful with him. He would turn a bit pale, would compress his lips and he would speak more deliberately, as though he were weighing every word.

Even in bombings—and near Kharkov, during our unsuccessful May offensive, we learned for the first time what bombing could be—he had been able to create calm, even slightly humorous atmosphere. Laughed and joked, made up rhymes, told stories.... a fine chap he'd been.... And now he was gone.... And many others too....

Where was Igor? Shiryayev? Sedykh? Maybe they weren't alive either.... How idiotic it all was....

They lived, studied, had their dreams and—bang!—everything was blasted—home, family, college, the history of architecture, the Parthenon....

The Parthenon.... I remembered it now—454-438 B.C.... Closed colonnade—Peripe-

tia. Eight columns in front, seventeen at the sides. And at the Thesum six and eighteen.... Doric, Ionic, Corinthian styles.... I liked the Doric best. More severe, plainer....

The order consisted of stylobate, columns and entablature. Columns—shaft, echinus and abacus.... No, I hadn't forgotten it yet.... And the entablature—architrave, frieze, cornice. Or the other way round.... cornice and frieze.... And what were those things called at the ends? Acro.... Acro.... Damn it, what were they called?... Yes.... Acroteria.

And who built St. Peter's in Rome? First Bramante. Then, I think, Sangallo.... or Raphael.... Then somebody else, and somebody else, and then Michaelangelo. He put on the cupola. And the colonnade? Bar-nini, I think....

Devil take it.... what nonsense comes into your head. Who needs it all? I'd got to capture that knoll, and here I am thinking of cupolas. A ton bomb would put an end to a cupola....

What am I to do with Farber even if I do take the knoll? There'd be a gap. The fourth company is forward, and the fifth a good way back. Probably I'll get orders to take the bridge. Or maybe the third battalion? Cut off the bridge and link up with us on the knoll. That would be fine.

Queer.... Not so long ago I'd been sitting on that Kurgan with Lucy looking at the Volga and the goods train crawling along below. And we'd talked about machine guns. Maybe it was just from there that that machine gun was covering us now....

Lucy had asked me if I liked Blok.¹ Queer girl. She should have asked if I had liked Blok—in the past tense. Yes. I had liked him. But I liked peace. That was what I liked most of all—nobody sending for me when I wanted to sleep, no orders....

When the war ended I'd settle down somewhere on the bank of a river, go fishing, and in the evenings sit on the veranda drinking tea with raspberry jam, while my wife sat beside me darning stockings.... What could be better? Frogs croaking, a cricket chirping behind the stove, moths fluttering round the lamp and a fat-bellied samovar on the table....

Somebody was pulling at my greatcoat. "Comrade Lieutenant.... Comrade Lieutenant.... Somebody's come from the political department—they're asking for you."

I peered out from under the flap. Two of them, in quilted jackets, and satchels stuffed with papers. Coming to check up, probably, or to observe the night attack.

Have to get up.

The clock showed two. Nine hours more....

8

The scouts came while it was still light, in quilted jackets, seamen's blouses, round caps—the usual things. German Tommy guns with projecting magazines slung across their backs.

Chumak saluted. Reported himself at my disposal. His eyes gleamed from under his

¹ Alexander Blok—Russian poet of the XXth century (1880—1921).

tousled hair. We had not met since our clash, he had been sent back to the river bank.

Our conversation was strictly official—objective, time, starting point. He knew it all anyway, and we only went through it because it was the accepted thing. And in general, there was nothing else for us to speak about. He made no attempt to conceal it. His tone was cold, dry, indifferent. When I met his eye, it was bored, slightly mocking. His men—three of them—were like himself, with unkempt hair, unbuttoned, hands in pockets. They stood aside looking at us, cigarette stubs stuck to their lips.

"Will you take camouflage overalls?"

"No."

"Why? I've got four."

"Don't need them."

"Some vodka?"

"We've got our own. Don't like other people's."

"Well, have it your own way."

"Have it yourself, drink to our health."

"Thanks."

"That's all right."

They went to Karnaukhov. When I arrived there, they had gone.

It was cramped in the cellar, not enough room to swing a cat. There were the two men from the political department, one from divisional headquarters, and the telephonist's chief from regimental headquarters. These were all observers. I knew they had to be there, but they got on my nerves. They all smoked incessantly—always that way before a big job. The captain from divisional headquarters was scribbling something in a notebook, spitting on his pencil.

"You've thought out the whole operation?" he asked, raising his colourless eyes to my face. He had long, buck teeth jutting out over his lower lip.

"Yes."

"The command considers it a most important one. You know that?"

"Yes, I know."

"How about your flanks?"

"What flanks?"

"When you advance, what's going to cover your flanks?"

"Nothing. I'll have support from the next battalions. I haven't got the men. We'll have to risk it."

"That's bad."

"Of course it is."

He scribbled something in his notebook.

"And what resources have you?"

"I haven't any resources, just a handful of men. Fourteen men will attack."

"Fourteen?"

"Yes. Fourteen. And fourteen stopping here. Twenty-eight in all."

"I wouldn't have ordered it that way in your place. . . ."

He glanced into his notebook.

I could not take my eyes from his teeth. I wondered if they were ever concealed, or always stuck out like that? I was almost certain that before the war he had been a book-keeper or clerk.

I slowly took my cigarette case out of my pocket.

"When you're in my place, then you'll

do as you think best, but meanwhile, permit me to follow my own judgement."

He compressed his lips as far as his teeth would permit. In deep absorption the two men from the political department jotted down something in their notebooks. They were decent fellows, they understood that this was no time for questions and silently got on with their own business.

Nobody said anything more.

Time passed with agonizing slowness. Every other minute headquarters would ring up to know whether or not the patrol had returned yet.

I went outside.

The night was pitch dark. Somewhere far away, beyond the Red October, something was burning and silhouettes of distorted girders stood out as though drawn in Indian ink. On the far side one solitary gun could be heard. It would fire and wait, fire and wait, as though it were stopping to listen. Machine guns were rattling. Rockets soared into the sky. Yellow today, for some reason. The Germans must have come to the end of their white ones. There was a smell of burning wood and paraffin. A fuel train was standing very close to us—plainly visible in the daytime. All day the paraffin trickled in thin streams from the bullet holes, and at night the men would race over to fill their lamps.

Obeying an old, childhood habit, I searched the sky for familiar stars. Orion—four bright stars and a belt of three smaller ones. And one more, very tiny, hardly visible. One of them was called Betelheiss—I could not remember which. Aldebaran ought to be somewhere too, but I had already forgotten where.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and jumped.

"What are you thinking about, Battalion Commander?"

With some difficulty I recognized Karnaukhov in the darkness.

"Oh . . . nothing much . . . star gazing."

He made no reply and we stood and watched the stars twinkling. From the depths of my consciousness there crept a half-forgotten thought of eternity, cosmos, of worlds existing and worlds dead, but still winking at us through the dark, infinite space. . . Stars burn out, stars are born. . . And we know nothing about it, and nobody ever knows or cares that in this dark October night a star has died after living for millions of years, or another has been born and science will learn of its existence after millions of years.

"There's snow in Siberia already," said Karnaukhov.

"Yes, there should be," I replied.

"And frozen."

"And frozen milk being sold. In chunks."

"But they're still bathing in Vladivostok."

"They say the sea's cold there."

"It's cold all right, but all the same they bathe there."

Somewhere far away, beyond the Volga, I caught the faintly audible sound of a "corn-hopper". Ours? And the patrol still not back. I listened to the approaching sound. It went off somewhere to the right, came closer, then faded. Not ours, then. There was the dull sound of an explosion beyond the Tractor Plant. German searchlights combed the sky

excitedly, broadening, narrowing, disappearing and again stabbing the heavens.

We stood watching the searchlights, the red-yellow-green pattern of German flack weaving in the sky, the rockets dying in the gully. We were so accustomed to the sight that if it had suddenly ceased we would have felt strange, as though something were lacking.

"Well, do you think, we'll take the knoll, Battalion Commander?" Karnaukhov asked very softly, almost in my ear.

"We'll take it," I replied.

"I think so too," and he squeezed my shoulder.

"What's your first name?" I asked.

"Nikolai."

"And I'm called Yuri."

"Yuri. I've got a brother called Yuri—a sailor."

"Still alive?"

"I don't know. He was at Sevastopol. On a submarine."

"He's probably alive," I said for some reason.

"Probably," said Karnaukhov rather more slowly, and we said no more.

A star fell. A soul gone to heaven, people used to say in the old days. We went down again.

9

Chumak's head appeared in the slit. He was followed by the other three—dirty, breathless, their faces wet with sweat. All at once the whole place seemed crowded.

I asked nothing, but waited.

Swaying, Chumak came silently to the table and seated himself on a packing case. He drank water from his flask in big gulps, then leisurely wiped his lips, forehead and neck. Took several packets of German cigarettes in green boxes from his pocket and threw them onto the table.

"Have a smoke."

He inserted a gold-tipped cigarette into a plexiglass holder.

"You can start. Signal's down."

And nodding to his scouts: "Finished. Shan't move till morning."

"Any mines?" I asked.

"Only in one place. Opposite the gun with the twisted barrel. A little higher."

"Many?"

"Didn't count 'em. We took out five. With whisks. Anti-personnel, shrapnel."

A German mine detonator winked in his hand, with three wires projecting from the top. The sappers called them whisks. The body of the mine was buried, with only the whisks remaining on the surface. If one trod on them, the hammer would strike the capsule, the capsule would fire the powder, the powder—the ejecting apparatus, the mine would jump up and explode in the air, spurt-ing shrapnel balls on all sides. Lousy mines.

"So don't go left of the gun. But to the right we tested for about two hundred metres and found nothing."

"Many Jerries?"

"Devil alone knows. . . Not so very many, I think. They're in the pillboxes. Got a gramophone going. Playing our *Katyusha*!"

Chumak fumbled in his pocket.

"You don't write poetry?"

His yellow-rimmed black eye looked at me with a certain mockery from beneath his forelock.

"No. Why?"

"Wanted to give you a fountain pen. A good one. And a bottle of fountain pen ink."

"No, I don't write."

"A pity. I thought you did. You look that kind—poetic."

He turned the red pen with its malachite design over in his hands, then thrust it back into his pocket.

"Did in a Jerry over there. Sentry."

I rang up Headquarters to report the return of the patrol. Valega offered me vodka. I didn't want it very much, but I took a glass. Chumak smiled ironically.

"To pep up the men?"

I said nothing. Looked for my tommy gun. Karnaukhov too was getting set. Chumak chewed his holder.

"Going far?"

"No, not very."

"If it's the knoll, think again. Cosier here."

I wakened the telephonist chief. He blinked eyes heavy with sleep, devoid of understanding.

"Take over command here, I'm going."

"Where?"

"Over there."

"OK."

I could see by his eyes that he hadn't taken anything in.

"Look after things with my chief of staff Kharlamov. If you see we're getting it bad, open fire."

He rose and hastily rubbed his eyes with his fists.

"OK. . . OK. . . ."

I hardly knew him—I had only seen him at the meeting with Borodin. They said he was a useful chap. Senior lieutenant. Graduated some course or other at the Academy.

Valega wanted to go with me, but I decided against it. Better not. He had twisted his ankle and had been limping about for three days.

"But why—how. . . ."

His small reproachful eyes stared in amazement from beneath his round, protruding forehead.

I slipped a magazine into my tommy gun.

"Maybe you'd like something to eat before you go. There's a can of pork. You didn't have any proper sort of dinner. I'll open it."

No, I wasn't hungry. When I came back, then I'd eat. But nevertheless, he pushed a crust of bread and a piece of pork fat wrapped in newspaper into my pocket. When I went to school my mother had pushed my lunch into my pocket like that. But in those days it was white bread or a doughring cut in half and buttered.

10

The "corn-hopper" is late. Ten minutes. Every minute seems an eternity to me. Impossible to smoke in the trenches. Don't know what to do with myself. It's cramped and my legs go to sleep. I can't find a comfort-

able position. A soldier beside me—a Siberian, no longer young—is crunching rusks. Issued today again instead of bread. A rocket flare shows his jaw muscles working on his unshaven cheeks.

Karnauchov on the right flank, Company Commander Sendetsky in charge here—not very bright, but a bold lad. Beat off the Germans very decently at Metiz. He was even wounded, but didn't go to the field hospital.

My neighbour stops eating his rusks.

"You hear it?"

"What?"

"That's the 'corn-hopper', isn't it?"

There's a rattle from the other side of the Volga . . . still very far away. We hold our breath. The sound approaches. Yes, ours. Making straight for us. If only it doesn't drop a packet here. Only seventy yards between us and the Germans—not more. Might get us. I've heard that they drop shells with their hands—ordinary mortar shells.

The sound comes close. Tiresome, sort of homely, not at all warlike. . . "Corn-hopper", "plywood kite" . . . In the newspapers it is called "light-motored night bomber" . . . Sounds just like a huge night-flying beetle. There are beetles that sound like that—humming, humming, and you can't see them.

The "corn-hopper" is right over our head. It circles—fixing the target. The Germans begin firing from the Kurgan. No searchlights—flying too low for them to be any use.

Now it'll drop a packet. . . .

Come on! . . .

You'd think he was trying our patience on purpose. The major rang up to say there'll be only one aircraft. It'll bomb twice, then fly for five or ten minutes to give us a chance to attack close.

The "corn-hopper" circles for the second time. I feel as though the men can hear my heart beating. I'm tensed up and sick with the longing to smoke. If I were alone, I'd crouch down and light up.

The "corn-hopper" drops its bombs. They burst like popguns. A little too high—the German trenches are closer. Though I think that's where the machine guns are.

Another circle. . . My jaws ache from holding the whistle between my teeth, it makes the saliva run. The whistle is like the one football referees blow when a goal's been shot.

The "corn-hopper" bombs again, this time right in the trenches. We duck our heads. Several splinters whistle right over our trench. One hums over us for a long time like a bee, and falls quite close, on the breastwork, between the men. It is too hot to touch. Small, jagged. But somehow it makes a cold shudder run down my spine.

The "corn-hopper" gets its machine guns going—short, white-flashing bursts, as though it were spitting.

Now. . . .

I give the signal, holding my hand lightly over the whistle. Listen. Hear chunks of clay falling to my right. . . .

Shall we take it or not? Impossible not to take it. I remember the Divisional Commander's eyes when he said: "Well, then you'll take it."

I unsling my Tommy gun and crawl downwards. Now the mine field is left behind.

Now the gun. Off to the side—about twenty metres. Three men to my left. They know they can't go over there. I warned them. I can't see them. I only hear them crawling.

The "corn-hopper" is still circling. No rockets. Jerry's afraid of betraying himself. That's good.

But what if it bombs again? Suppose somebody's got things mixed up? Not twice, but three times. . . . That sort of thing can happen. Or if the pilot forgets. Give 'em another packet, for luck. . . .

We crawled across the bottom of the gully. Our clothes catch on bushes. Up the other side. We don't want to run on them unexpectedly. . . . Of course, Chumak said their trenches begin only beyond the bushes. A twig snaps to the right. Some careless devil. . . .

I go on crawling. Higher and higher. Holding my breath heaven knows why. As though anybody could hear me breathing. There's a star straight in front of me—large and bright, unwinking, the star of Bethlehem. I am crawling straight towards it.

Suddenly—rat-tat-tat . . . right by my ear. I hug the ground. I even seem to feel the wind of the bullets. Damn it, where the hell's that coming from?

I raise my head. Can't make out a thing . . . black. . . Silence. Not a crackle, not a rustle. The "corn-hopper" is somewhere behind us. Now the Germans will start lighting up no-man's land.

I want to sneeze. Hold my nose tight and rub the bridge. Crawl on. The bushes are somewhere behind me. Now for the trenches. German trenches. . . . Another five yards, another ten. . . . Nothing. I crawl cautiously, feeling my way with my hands. The Germans like placing their mines irregularly. . . . From somewhere underground comes the sound of a foxtrot—a saxophone, a piano and something else, I can't catch what. . . .

Rat-tat-tat. . . .

That machine gun again, but behind us now. . . . What the devil does that mean? Can we have gone too far? . . . A muffled shout. A shot. The machine gun again. The battle is on. . . .

I hurl a grenade at random somewhere in front, where everything had gone dark. Rush forward. Every muscle and nerve in my body is alive. Figures flicker in the darkness like startled birds. . . . Cries, dull thuds, shots, curses through clenched teeth. . . . A trench. . . . Crumbling soil. . . . Machine gun belts tangled round my legs. . . . Something soft, warm and sticky. . . . Something rises before me, and disappears. . . .

A night engagement. The most complicated kind of fighting. Single combats. Here the fighter is everything. Initiative, courage, ingenuity—that's what decides it all. Here there's no feeling of companionship with the man beside you, as there is in a day attack, no feeling of someone else at your elbow. No "hurrah", that rousing "hurrah" that eases the tension and covers everything. No green greatcoats. No helmets and caps. No visibility. And no way back. Because you don't know which way is back and which way is forward.

You don't see the end of the fight, you only feel it. And afterwards, it's difficult

to remember anything clearly. It's impossible to describe a night battle or tell about it. In the morning you discover abrasions, bruises, blood... But at the time you know nothing about it... A trench, a bend... somebody... a blow... a shot... a rifle butt... a step back, another blow. And then—silence. . . .

Who's that? Ours... Where are ours? The devil only knows. Come on. Stop... That a Jerry? No, ours. . . .

Can we have taken the knoll? Impossible. Where are the Germans? Where've they gone? We came from over there. Where's Karnaukhov?

"Karnaukhov! Karnaukhov!"

"They're in front there."

"Where?"

"Over there, by the machine gun."

Somewhere far ahead, a machine gun rattles. Our machine gun now.

11

Karnaukhov had lost his cap and was searching for it in the darkness beneath his feet.

"A good one. I've had it all through the war. A pity."

"You'll find it in the morning. Nobody'll take it."

He laughed.

"Well, how about it, Comrade Battalion Commander? We've taken the knoll, all the same."

"Yes, we've taken it, Karnaukhov, we've taken it." And I laughed too and for some reason I wanted to hug him.

The sky was turning yellow in the east. In an hour the moon would rise and it would be light.

"Send to Headquarters to bring up a telephone."

"I have. In half an hour we'll be able to talk to the major."

"Checked up on the men?"

"Yes. Ten so far. Four missing. Machine gunners are all here. I've already placed the light machine guns, and as for the heavy guns—I think it's not too bad here for one. And the second. . . ."

"The second over there to the right. See?"

"Shall we go and look?"

"Come along."

We went along the trenches, stooping, looking for machine-gun emplacements. The Germans had evidently had a circular defence. . . . As for them, no sight or sound of them. There was firing somewhere to the right and left—the First and Third battalion's sectors. Our eyes were getting used to the darkness by this time, and it was possible to distinguish things a little. Twice we stumbled over German bodies. Something was still burning beyond the Red October.

"Where's Sendetsky?"

"I'm here," came an unexpected voice from the darkness. Then a figure loomed up.

"Cut off to Headquarters. Tell Kharlamov to get the men out of their old trenches quick and link up with our right flank. Find out just where it is, as you go. I rather think

we've no men beyond that bush. That right, Karnaukhov?"

"Yes."

"Get that, Sendetsky? Off with you, then! One foot here, the other there!"

Sendetsky disappeared. We found places for two machine guns and returned. Bumped into somebody in the darkness.

"Battalion Commander?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Found a grand pillbox. . . . Come and see it. Never seen anything like it."

Chumak's voice.

"What are you doing here?"

"The same as you. . . ."

"Came for booty? Is that it?"

"And what about you? Didn't you come to get something?"

"Well, maybe that too. . . ."

Chumak stopped suddenly and I collided with him.

"Well. . . . what are you stopping for?"

"Listen, Battalion Commander. . . . It looks as if. . . . you're. . . ."

"What's the matter with you, are you drunk?"

"Just a little. . . . A tiny bit. There's cognac there—Four-star—know how much?"

"No, I don't. Keep going."

He made no reply and we went on. A slight breeze rose. It ruffled our hair pleasantly, found its way under our collars and fanned our bodies. It made one a little dizzy and gave a strange lightness to the body. Like those early spring days when you go for a walk in the country for the first time. You're drunk with fresh air, you can hardly drag your legs any more, you ache all over with the unaccustomed exercise but still you go on walking and walking wherever your fancy takes you, coat unbuttoned, hatless, filling your lungs with the sweet spring air till you feel drunk with it. . . .

Then we found ourselves sitting in the pillbox, a deep one, with a fourfold roofing and a half metre of soil on top of that. Board walls papered with paper that looks like oilcloth. Over the green baize card table with bent legs, a number of postcards arranged fanwise—an olive branch with a half-melted candle, a round-eyed pug, an overturned inkwell, a gnome in a red cap and an angel sailing through the sky. A little higher—the Führer, in exalted mood, with compressed lips and a shining mackintosh.

On the table—a green-shaded lamp. Five bottles. Sardines. Kid gloves tossed on the pallet.

Chumak felt quite at home, poured out cognac into the thin monogrammed glasses.

"The Führer's had a care for our stomachs... We'll thank him."

It was good cognac, strong, seemed to warm us up right to our toes.

Karnaukhov drank his and went straight out. Chumak looked curiously at the linked vines twining round the label. French cognac.

"You've a heavy hand, Lieutenant. Never thought you had it in you."

"What hand?"

His yellowish eyes laughed.

"That one, that you've got your cigarette in."

I couldn't make out what he was getting at.

"My left shoulder still feels as though it isn't mine."

"What left shoulder?"

"Don't you remember?" He laughed gaily, throwing his head back. "Don't you remember cracking me with your rifle butt? With a good swing to it. . . On the left shoulder blade."

"Stop a bit . . . stop a bit. . . When was that?"

"When? Half an hour ago. In the trench. Took me for a Jerry. And let me have it . . . one biff and went on. And I'd been thinking you were a poet—wrote verses. Offered you a pen. . . I wanted to give you one back, but then a real Jerry bobbed up, so I let him have it instead. . . ."

I remembered that I really had bashed somebody with my rifle butt, but in the dark I wasn't sure of anything.

"For a bang like that I don't grudge a watch," said Chumak, fumbling in his pocket. "A good one. It's got jewels. 'Tawan-watsch'. . . ."

We laughed together.

Telephonists dragging packing cases and bobbins of wire tumbled into the pillbox, panting like steam engines.

"Hardly got here. . . Nearly paid a visit to the Jerries!"

"Jerries?"

A flaxen-headed telephonist with watery eyes let out his breath and took his earphones off.

"They're thick as beetles down there in the gully."

"What gully?"

"The one where our front line was."

The pupils of Chumak's eyes were suddenly like pinpoints.

"You're alone, or with your boys?" I asked him.

"This isn't their business. I'll just. . . ."

Grabbing his tommy gun, even forgetting to put on his tunic he disappeared through the doorway.

Could they have cut us off?

The telephonists dragged a line in through the door.

"It's sure that the Jerries are in the gully?"

"Couldn't be surer," the flaxen one replied.

"Rubbed noses with 'em. Five were crawling about. We opened fire on them."

"Maybe it's ours taking over new positions?"

"What men of ours? Ours were still sitting in the trenches when we left. I met the company commander on the way, that one with his neck bandaged. Looking for the chief of staff."

"Well, come on, get me the battalion."

The flaxen-haired man slipped the phones over his ears.

"Jupiter. . . Jupiter. . . Hallo. . . Jupiter. . . ."

I could tell by his colourless, white eyelashes that there was no reply.

"Jupiter. . . Jupiter. It's I . . . Mars. . . ."

A pause.

"That's that. Cut us off, the swine. Lyoshka, go and test the line."

Lyoshka—a red-nosed fellow with big ears in a huge cap, grumbled but went.

"Cut it, that's a fact . . ." said the fair

man calmly, taking a cigarette from behind his ear.

I went out. From the gully I could hear tommy-gun fire interspersed with scattered rifle shots.

Chumak appeared.

"They're there all right, Battalion Commander. . . . We're encircled. . . ."

"Managed it, then?"

"They've managed it. Jerries in the trenches along that slope."

"Many of them?"

"D'ye think we could tell? They were firing from everywhere."

"And where's Karnaukhov?"

"Placing the machine guns. He'll be along soon."

Chumak took out a green package of cigarettes.

"Have a smoke. They're Jerry's."

We lit up.

"Well, Chumak, we're in a mess. . . No getting away from it."

"In a mess all right," laughed Chumak.

"But keep your shirt on, Battalion Commander. We'll get out of it. My men are here too. We've machine guns. All the ammunition you want. They left everything. There's even hot supper in the thermos containers. What more d'you want?"

Karnaukhov arrived. He had already organized a circular defence. Two German machine guns had turned up, and plenty of grenades. Ten cases untouched, and more in every emplacement and in the niches. . . .

"Only it's bad that we can't get their trenches under fire from our side. Too low down."

"How many men have we got in all?"

"Infantry—twelve. Two didn't turn up. Two heavy machine guns. Two light ones. Two more German ones. That makes six."

"And my three lads too," Chumak thrust in, "and two telephonists. We can make do."

"That makes twenty-six," I said.

Karnaukhov reckoned it again in his head.

"No—twenty-two. I don't count the men with the light machine guns—they're counted in the twelve infantry."

The firing never ceased from the gully. It would increase, then die down again. Evidently ours were firing from the other side, and the Germans were replying. Tracer bullets span their way like fine threads from one side of the gully to the other. The Germans didn't have it easy, firing at us from the gully. Their situation wasn't too pleasant either—pressed on from two sides.

Then firing broke out somewhere to the left. The Germans were bringing up more men. Hemming us in. They used no rockets, and it was difficult to be sure just where their front line was.

We went to check up on the firing points.

How idiotically it had all turned out. What had I gone into the attack for? The battalion commander should direct it, not lead it. Well, here's where my directing had landed us. I'd relied on the first battalion. After all, I'd definitely agreed with Sinitsin that as soon as I sent up a red rocket, he should open fire

with everything he had, a little demonstration, to give my remnants a chance to occupy the new positions. Though it seemed that they had fired. It was Kharlamov and the telephonist chief that had wasted time.

Of course, I could fight my way back. But what good was that? We'd have lost the knoll, would have a fat chance of getting it back. To sit idle and hold off the enemy with our fire had no more sense. But ours wouldn't sit there on the other side doing nothing. And it was just the moment for the third battalion to get going—cut off the bridge and link up with us.

The ammunition would last for two days, even if we had to beat off attacks all the time. Nearly all of the previous day our machine guns had been silent—to economize cartridges. . . Plenty of grenades too. Only the men were scarce. . . And all huddled together on one spot. There's to be no respite from German mortars.

Just after four the Germans attacked. Tried to crawl up unobserved. Our machine guns hadn't the range or sight, but we repulsed that first attack with comparative ease. The Germans never even got as far as the trenches.

In two places our trenches joined with the German ones. Two long communication ways stretched in right-angled zigzags towards the water tower. Deep ones, almost the height of a man. They had been quite invisible from our side. I gave orders for them to be repaired in several places.

Another oversight. We had brought no sappers' spades with us, and we found only three German ones, though they were good—strong steel implements, with good smooth handles.

We had barely begun digging when the mortars started off. First one, then two, and by evening even three batteries. Shells were exploding continuously, one after the other. The Germans were working us over most methodically. We crouched down in the pill-boxes, leaving only sentries on top.

We had two casualties—a broken leg, wounded by a splinter, and an eye knocked out. We bandaged them with our first-aid kits—we had nothing else.

In the afternoon, the attacks began again, three of them, one after the other. Two companies, no less. As long as I had machine guns, that didn't worry me. Four machine guns opposite the gully, spaced out—we could hold off a whole regiment. Things would be worse if tanks appeared. Over by the cisterns it was as flat as a pancake. And we had only two tank busters—Simonov guns. Perhaps our folks would think of placing a couple of '45's on the other side of the gully. . . .

At three o'clock our long-distance guns began, from the opposite bank. They continued for about an hour—pretty accurate firing. We even managed to have dinner. The shells were bursting not very far away—about a hundred yards from our front. One lot came quite close, the splinters flying over our heads. For two hours the Germans did not trouble us.

Then, just before evening, two more attacks—barrage and everything.

Then silence. The first rockets soared up.

Chumak was lounging on a bed-board, telling us about some Musya at the hospital.

Karnauchov and I were cleaning our revolvers.

The lamp seemed strangely peaceful beneath its green shade.

"You know the way it is there, in Kuibyshev?" said Chumak, inhaling some smoke and spitting. "The gate's locked. A sentry there. Walk about the garden, nowhere else, and the garden's as big as a pocket-handkerchief. Walls all round, asphalt in the middle, benches, and ice-cream stands. Well, you walk up and down that garden and talk about the nurses. They're all right, those nurses, they've got guts. . . Only they're scared of the medical officers. They'll sit with you on a bench, or on the edge of your bed, but as for anything else—nothing doing. . . Can't be done and that's all there is to it. . . When I was still in bed, it didn't matter. Didn't bother me. I even began to get worried. But when I was up, I began to feel frisky. But frisky or not, it didn't help. . . Nothing doing, Comrade. You need to rest, get fit. . . Fine sort of rest. Lie on your bed and go to the cinema in the evening. And all the pictures old ones—*Alexander Nevsky*, *Minin and Pozharsky*, *A Girl With Character*. And they kept breaking like thread. And the smell of plaster of Paris. Br-r-r!"

The corner of Karnauchov's mouth curved in a smile.

"Get back to the point—you were telling us of some Musya. . . ."

"Musya'll come all in good time. Don't interrupt. If you don't like it, don't listen. I'm telling the lieutenant. . . ."

He stabbed out his cigarette end on the green baize table with his thumb.

"The lieutenant's never been in hospital. Have to teach him the ropes."

He reached for another cigarette.

"They're too mild. . . Don't feel you're smoking anything. . . . And demonstratively turning towards me, he continued. "Well, my arm was in a cast. Smashed radius—the left. Couldn't get comfortable at night. A hook sticking out all the time. Good thing the fracture was below the elbow. The boys with the upper arm or collarbone broken had a lousy time. Plaster armour right across the chest and the arm on a splint. We called them 'aeroplanes' in the hospital. Went about with an arm sticking out half a yard in front. And my other wound was low down on my back, yes. . . the splinter's still there. Doesn't bother me now, I don't feel it, but then—to sit down on the latrine was a work of art. And I felt awkward with Musya. . . And she was a fine bit of goods. Plaits like that. And her smock showed off her trim figure. She'd sit down on my bed—I wasn't walking yet—feed me scrambled eggs with a spoon, and I'd be on pins and needles. . . Then we began climbing out of the window. You could jump down easily from the bathroom—not more than a couple of yards. If you climbed onto the radiator, your chin would be on the windowsill. There was a captain in my ward, an engineer like you. A well educated chap, he'd been chief engineer at a factory

before the war. Well, at night we'd sneak out of the window in our nightshirts and pants with the hospital stamp on them, and there was a house we knew just round the corner. There we'd change into other clothes and off to the town. The captain had a stomach wound, but he was convalescent. He'd crawl in first, then pull me up by my plaster hook. And when they boarded up the window—somebody saw us—we managed to swarm down the water pipes. There was a man with us who'd lost a leg. He'd hang his crutches on one arm and down he'd go like a monkey, only knocked the plastering about a bit. . . . You can always manage somehow. If you'd buried us under the ground we'd have popped up again." Karnaukhov laughed.

"At Baku we used to sneak out during the movie shows. You'd hear thump-thump-thump outside the window—one after the other. When the show ended, there'd only be the bed patients left."

"What's there about the cinema. . . ." Chumak interrupted, without turning. "In Ward 6 we made a rope ladder. The real thing, with rungs—all you could want. We used it for a couple of weeks. There was a big tree just under the window, nobody could see us. But then they began washing the windows—they were expecting a visit from some brass hats—and tore down our ladder. All the ward had to go to the head surgeon of the department. . . . But what was the use. Next day Ward 7 was off. . . ."

The lamp looked wonderfully peaceful with its green shade. Mice were rustling and scratching between the beams. Somewhere away on top, occasional mortar shells were exploding.

The yellow-bearded gnome sat on an agaric mushroom stool smoking a long pipe with a lid. An angel flew through a thick inky sky. Somebody had adorned Hitler with a beard and a gorgeous "Maupassant" moustache, which made him look like a hairdresser's dummy.

In the next dugout, wounded men were lying. We had bandaged them with our own dressing—all we had. They continually asked for a drink—and water was scarce—two German thermos containers for twenty men.

During the day we had beaten off seven attacks and lost four in killed, four in wounded and had one machine gun smashed.

I finished oiling my revolver and put it into the holster. Then I stretched out on the pallet.

"Going to sleep, Lieutenant, eh?" asked Chumak.

"No, I'm just going to lie down a little."

"Tired of hearing about the hospital?"

"No, go on, I'm listening."

He continued his tale. I lay on my side, listening to his endless story of the conquest of the nurse, looking at the figure in its strip-sailor's singlet sprawling lazily on the bed, at Karnaukhov's large fingers shiny with oil working over the revolver, and the lock hair falling into his eyes. He kept pushing back with his bent arm, so as not to dirty his face with oily hands. It seemed impossible at an hour or two ago we had been warding off attacks, and dragging wounded men along the narrow awkward trenches, that we were

sitting here on a tiny patch, cut off from everybody.

"It was a great life in hospital, all the same, eh, Chumak?" I asked.

"A great life," he replied.

"Better than here?"

"What d'you think! Lying there, nothing to think of, no 'tongues'¹, no assignments, just eat, sleep and go for medical treatment."

"And weren't you wanting to get back to your own mob?"

"What mob?"

"The regiment, the fellows?"

"Of course, I was. That's why I got discharged a month earlier than I should have."

"And you said it was a great life in hospital, no assignments," laughed Karnaukhov.

"What's up with you, you hyena? As if you hadn't been there yourself, didn't know. It's the grass on the other side of the hedge. When you're here you think of the hospital, of playing the fool there, lying on clean sheets, but when you're there, you don't know what to do with yourself, you want to be back at the front with the boys."

Karnaukhov assembled his revolver—he had a big one, a captured Walter, with a butt that lay very sweetly in one's palm and pushed it into the holster.

"How many times have you been in hospital, Chumak?"

"Three. And you?"

"Twice."

"And I—three times. Two base hospitals, and one in the rear."

Karnaukhov laughed.

"It's kind of queer when you come back to the front. Isn't it? Have to get used to everything all over again."

"Not so bad when you come from a base hospital—you don't spend so much time there. But those in the rear. . . . I came back from Kuibyshev—it was downright silly. A mortar shell would burst, and there I'd be squatting down."

Both laughed.

"It's the queerest thing, Comrade Lieutenant," said Karnaukhov, wiping his oily hands on his quilted trousers. "When you're in the trenches, you feel there's nothing better than your quiet dugout. Battalion H.Q.'s like the rear. And as for regimental or divisional H.Q.! The men even call all those on the bank rear services. . . ."

"But haven't you ever seen the kind," Chumak broke in—he could never keep quiet for long, "that sit a hundred kilometres from the front lines, and throw their chests out and call themselves on active service? . . . There was one with us in hospital. . . ."

He stopped suddenly, his eyes fixed on the door.

"Where've you come from?"

Karnaukhov was also staring at the door.

What the devil—Valega! . . . in the flesh—with his big head, round forehead, in his huge boots with thick socks turned down over them. Standing there in the doorway. In a greatcoat—mine, it looked like—right down to his ankles. Shifting from foot to foot.

¹ A prisoner captured for information purposes.

"Where've you come from, Valega?"

"From over there. . . From ours. . ."

He saluted awkwardly. He was never very smart with it. Unfastened a sack from his back.

"I've brought tinned pork . . . your greatcoat. . ."

"You've gone crazy!"

"Why! it crazy? Not at all. And here's a note for you."

"Who from?"

"Kharlamov gave it to me, the chief of staff."

"Did he send you?"

"No, it wasn't him. I came myself. . ."

Valega took a can and two loaves from his sack. "I was packing the sack, and he was talking with that other one—from the regimental headquarters—wondering how to get in touch with you, said they'd have to do it somehow. So I said that I was just going to you. He started looking for something, and then gave me this note."

From his breast pocket—stuffed with paper and letters, like all soldiers—he extracted a page torn from a notebook and folded in four. Held it out to me. In Kharlamov's neat writing I read:

"5. 10 42. 12. 15 H.Q. Hurricane.

"Comrade Lieutenant. In accordance with Order No. 31 I hereby report that today at 4:00 we shall attack with the object of linking up with your right wing, and the assignment of cutting off the enemy grouping which has penetrated the gully, and destroying it. I also report the arrival of 7 (seven) men as reinforcements. Storm telephoned that a new commander had arrived to take your place. We have not yet seen him. How are things with you, Comrade Lieutenant? Captain Abrosimov came early in the morning with several brass hats. Hold on, Comrade Lieutenant, we'll help you.

Kharlamov, Lt."

The signature was ministerial, slanting, with flourishes, a marvellous baroque capital and a whole flock of curls, angles and dots like birds fluttering about it.

I tore up the note, and burned the fragments. To think of sending a note like that across the front line. . . Eh, Kharlamov, Kharlamov. . . Not a bad fellow at bottom, did his best, but too. . .

Valega was opening the tin with an ingenious German opener with a little wheel on the end. That lop-eared devil! . . Crawled across the front line with that tin. And dragged my greatcoat along. And brought a note at the same time. "I said I was just going to you." As though it was just round the corner, on the first floor.

Valega was sniffing, trying to open the tin with the unfamiliar opener. He had not even asked if I was hungry. And I asked no questions—I was afraid I might not be able to preserve the proper tone. They came from the others—Karnaikhov, Chumak. Valega replied reluctantly.

"Only the greatcoat was in my way, it's too big. . . But for the rest, nothing much. There's a bit to the left—gap between their trenches I saw it during the day, but at night. . . Would you like it heated, Comrade Lieutenant?"

"No, thanks. And there's nothing to heat it on."

"You didn't think of bringing a primus stove along?" laughed Chumak.

Instead of replying, Valega pulled from his greatcoat pocket a German spirit stove and a handful of white tablets of dry spirit lumps of sugar. Silently, without a gleam of a smile, he put it on the table.

"Not worth it, Valega. We'll eat it as it is."

And all four of us emptied the tin with the best appetite. A fine thing, tinned por-

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The clock said half past three. A quarter to four. Four. We waited. Half past four. Five. . . Silence. . . Six, seven. . . It was getting light. We waited no longer.

Another day. . .

All morning the Germans plastered us with their mortars—medium and even heavy. By three, there were only twelve men left out of our sixteen. Four of the wounded—yesterday's—were dying. Blood poisoning, seemed to me. One had tetanus. That's a terrible thing. He was dying before my eyes. Not a young man, about forty. He had been wounded in the right forearm by an explosive bullet, and all the time he was afraid that his arm might be amputated. Before the war he had been a turner.

"How'll I be without an arm?" he said, carefully laying the bandaged arm with a splint made from a cartridge box on his knee.

"Can't do my job with only one arm now. Better without a leg." And he looked enquiringly from me to Karnaikhov, as though our opinion were worth anything. We told him that the bone would knit quickly, and the flesh would grow again too, and the nerves weren't damaged, since he could move his fingers. That comforted him. He even began telling me about some improvement which he had made to his lathe before the war. Then his face began twitching. His mouth spread into a horrible tense grin. Thick cords stood out on his neck. Convulsions seized his whole body, it bent like a bow, supported by his neck and heels on the ground. And he screamed. It was impossible to straighten him—his body was stiff as an iron rod.

"That's tetanus," said Karnaikhov. "He had one that died of it in the field hospital."

He died two hours later.

His name was Fesenko. I learned that from his soldier's small book. The name seemed familiar to me. I had heard it somewhere. Later I remembered. He was one of the soldiers who had been digging on the mine when I had returned from the minefield. He had not been able to explain to the runner where the Battalion Commander was.

A 120 mm. mortar shell plumped into the dugout. Theoretically it should have been able to stand it. . . four roofings of 25 c. beams and earth on top. In practice, it was wrecked—the roof held, but the explosion ripped off the lining and the earth fell.

We transferred to the neighbouring pillbox where the wounded were lying. There were ten of them. One of them with a head wound was delirious. He kept talking of some-

ubs, then he called somebody, and again—the zinc tubs. His face was waxen and his eyes closed. It looked as though he was dying.

We did not bury the dead. Mortar shells were whistling and exploding incessantly—I counted six in one minute. There were breathing-spaces, but never more than six or seven minutes—just enough to go and see if the sentries were still alive.

The last cigarette, scraped together from all pockets—half tobacco, half bread crumbs. Three of us smoked it—Karnaukhov, Chumak and myself. No more tobacco. We had already collected all the old butts.

Water was coming to an end. A splinter had hit one thermos container, and nearly all the water had trickled out before we noticed it—I stooped to pick up a pencil and my hand touched a pool. In the other there was ten litres, no more. And all the time the wounded were begging for a drink. We did not know whether they should have it or not. One had an abdominal wound—impossible for him. And all the time he kept pleading, pleading—“Just a tiny drop, Comrade Lieutenant, just a drop, my mouth’s dry . . .” and his eyes made one want to sink through the earth. The machine guns also needed water.

After three, the Germans began to attack. That lasted till evening. Attack, barrage, attack, barrage.

We beat off the final attack with our last bit of strength. The water boiling in the machine guns made them hiss like kettles.

Where to get water? If there was no water, the machine guns would be silent tomorrow, and that would mean . . .

In the evening we had a check up.

Men—eleven. Myself, Chumak, Karnaukhov, Valega, two telephonists, four machine gunners—two to a gun—and one infantryman, the same Siberian who had been with me in the slit trench. His right hand had been hit, but he was full of pep. Besides these, three wounded. The delirious man died in the evening and we carried him out to a trench where we laid all the dead.

We had four machine guns. Two were disabled. There was sufficient ammunition for the German ones, and our own would do for half a day at a pinch.

But the main thing was water. Water . . . without that all those cartridges weren’t worth a cent. Would we contact ours tonight or not? We just had to, that’s all. They knew well enough that we could not hold out there forever. And if we were killed off, then that was the end of the knoll.

My head swam from the longing to smoke. Somewhere or other Valega found a wet, crushed cigarette on a dead German. We each took a drag at it in turn, inhaling deeply, closing our eyes and burning our finger tips. In a couple of hours we too would be beginning to think of water . . . there was no more than two litres in the thermos—the iron ration for machine guns. From somewhere in the depths of the pillbox the telephonists brought out a dozen fat, appetizing pickled herrings, parchment-wrapped. My mouth watered. Smooth and silvery, with soft backs and tiny drops of fat at the head, like dew. You wanted to sink your teeth into them.

I crawled out into the trench and hurled them as far as possible towards the Germans. Then I returned.

The wounded men were quieter. They lay there on the ground, breathing heavily. We had put folded greatcoats under them. The pillbox was much more uncomfortable than the old one. A table made of boards nailed together, and covered with newspaper—and that was all. Our green-shaded lamp looked foolish against the damp, crumbling walls. We had brought it from the other pillbox—how it escaped, nobody could guess.

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The Soviet attack was unsuccessful. We stood in the trenches and watched the firing. The Germans were using their machine guns without pause or letup. The rounds met, crossed, flew high into the sky. Here and there mortars flashed on the other side of the gully. Then they fell silent. There remained only the usual, methodical firing. We returned to the dugout.

We did not sleep all night. Talk didn’t hang together. The lack of tobacco made everybody irritable. The wounded men kept asking for water. Towards morning, another one died.

At seven, a German reconnaissance plane flew over. It kept droning, droning, and circling, its cabin glass shining. Then, without any preliminary artillery barrage, the Germans attacked.

We held them off with four machine guns. Two served by machine gunners, two by Chumak with Karnaukhov, and myself with Valega. The telephonists and the elderly man held the flanks.

The sun was behind us. Good for firing.

Then came a barrage. We took the machine guns down and sat up, with splinters flying over our heads. It was only now that I noticed how haggard Valega had become. His cheeks had fallen in, and his eyes were large and serious. As he squatted, his knees nearly reached his ears.

One shell bursts in the communication trench a few paces from us.

“Swine!” said Valega.

“Swine!” I echoed.

The barrage lasts for twenty minutes. An exhausting business. Then we drag the machine gun out onto the emplacement and wait.

Chumak waves his hand. All I can see is his head and arm.

“They got the two on the left,” he calls.

Three machine guns left.

We beat off one more attack. My machine gun jams. It’s a German one, I’m not sure of it. I shout for Chumak.

He comes running along the trench. Limping. A splinter got him in the rear. There’s a hole in his round cap over his right ear.

“Done in those two,” he says, taking out the lock. “Nothing left of them, Jerry shot them to pieces!”

I make no reply. Chumak does something I can’t see with the lock and puts it back.

“Got enough cartridges, Battalion Commander?”

"For the present."

"There's another case over there by the dugout. The last, I think."

"A shell got it. . . ."

He looks me hard in the eyes. I can see my own reflection in his pupils.

"We aren't clearing out, Lieutenant?" His dry, bloodless lips barely move.

"No."

He holds out his hand and I grip it. Hard. Then the old Siberian is killed.

We're firing again. The machine gun shakes feverishly. I can feel little trickles of sweat running down my chest, my back, and from under my armpits.

In front the ground is level. Repulsive grey earth. Only one single crooked bush, like a hand with gouty fingers. Then that disappears too, sliced off by machine-gun fire.

I've lost count of the German attacks. One, two, ten, twelve. My head's ringing. Or perhaps it's aircraft? Chumak shouts something. I can't make anything out. Valega hands me belt after belt. How quickly they end. Empty cartridge cases all round—nowhere to step. . . .

The devil. . . Gimme another! Another. . . Another. . . Valega! He's dragging up a case. . . His rear wobbles comically—right, left. Sweat runs into my eyes—warm and sticky.

Come on. . . Come on!

A face. . . Red, capless, shiny.

"Comrade Lieutenant, let me. . . ."

"Go to the devil! . . ."

"But you're wounded. . . ."

"Go to the devil. . . ."

The face disappears, in its place I see something white, or yellow, or red, one on the other. The sort of thing you see in the cinema—spreading circles, with a title above. The circles broaden, pale, lose colour, quiver. Then suddenly—ammonia. The circles disappear. A face. A blonde lock of hair, an open collar, eyes—laughing blue eyes. Shiryayev's eyes. And Shiryayev's hair. And the green-shaded lamp. And the ammonia making my eyes tear.

"D'you know me, Engineer?"

Shiryayev's voice. And somebody embracing me, shaking me, and somebody's collar in my mouth—rough, prickly.

Why, of course, that's our pillbox. And Valega. And Kharlamov. And Shiryayev. Shiryayev in the flesh, living, palpable, with his yellow forelock.

"Well, d'you know me?"

"Jesus Christ, of course. . . ."

"Thank the Lord for that. . . ."

"Thank the Lord."

We shook hands and laughed and didn't know what to say. And everybody around us was laughing too, for some reason.

"Careful, Comrade Senior Lieutenant, he's wounded. You'll shake him to pieces."

Valega, of course. Shiryayev waved his hand.

"That's no wound. A scratch, nothing more. . . It'll be healed by tomorrow."

I felt weak, my head was spinning, especially when I turned it.

"Want something to drink?"

I had no time to reply before I found a

sour-tasting tin between my lips, and something cold seemed to seep pleasantly through my whole body.

"Where've you dropped from, Shiryayev?"

"From the moon."

"No. Seriously."

"How d'you mean, where from? Got my orders and that's all. Commander of your battalion. . . Don't you like it?"

He hadn't changed a mite. Not even lost flesh. The same husky, broad-shouldered smart chap, with his cap cocked over one eye.

"You're not looking so spry," he said, still with the broad, white-toothed grin that could not leave his face. "You don't seem to have been having much of a rest."

"Yes, resting's been a bit neglected. . . But wait a bit, wait a bit. Where've you come from now?"

"What's the odds? I've come, and that's that."

"And the Jerries?"

"Jerry's sloped off. Made tracks from the gulley. Even left two prisoners."

"Many of you?"

"Well, more or less. Two battalions. Yours and the third. Fifty men."

"Fifty?"

"Fifty."

"You're pulling my leg!"

He laughed again, and so did all the others.

"Why? Do you think it's a lot?"

"Don't you?"

"Well. . . That depends. . . ."

"Stop. . . The bridge? How about the bridge?"

"There's still five men there," Kharlamov thrust in. "But they won't be there long."

"Grand. Just grand. . . And Chumak, Karnaukhov?"

"They're alive, they're alive. . . ."

"Thank the Lord. Give me some more water."

In the evening Shiryayev and I sat in battalion headquarters—the pipe under the embankment.

My wound was nothing—a scratch on my forehead and a track through my hair. I could even drink. Though not much. And we drank some stinking stuff, spirit or home-distilled vodka, and ate pickled herrings—the same ones that I had thrown away on the knoll. Valega couldn't stand for that, of course.

"How could you throw them away? The last time you had vodka, you yourself said: 'If only there was a herring, Valega. . . .'" And he laid them out in neat pieces, with the bones taken out, on a newspaper scrounged from Kharlamov's archives—a constant source of friction between them.

Lying on the wooden bed-boards, I looked at Shiryayev, and tried to find some change in him. No, he was just the same—even the same blue triangle of singlet visible at his open collar.

"Heard anything of Maximov?" I asked.

"No. . . Somebody told me, I don't remember who, that he thought he'd seen him on this side of the Don. But it's not very likely. I've been everywhere this side, and never met him."

"And who've you seen of ours?"

"Ours?" Shiryayev frowned. "Ours. . .

Some of the company commanders. The scouts' chief—Goglidze. He passed on a lorry. Waved his hand. Well, and who else? The girls from the field hospital... The Party organizer—Kostrichny. . . Yes!" He slapped the table with his palm. "Nearly forgot. That friend of yours, the chemist... what's his name?"

"Igor. Where?" I started up.
 "On this side. Five days ago."
 "You're lying."
 "Again lying. He's at the Red October. In the 39th."
 "The 39th?"

"For some reason or other he's not in the Chemical Department now, but he's an engineer, like you. Some sort of mine fields, high explosives, and that sort of thing."

"And what were you doing in the 39th?"
 "Nothing. Just happened along. Looking for Army Headquarters. Some fool told me it was in Banny Gulley. So I shoved my nose in there. Any idea what it's like? You can't see three paces ahead. Smoke, dust... thick as hell... Jerry was just doing his stuff. Me for a foxhole. Not even a real hole, but anything there was. Then I saw a wooden door. Made for it—shelter from the splinters, anyway. Crawled in. When Jerry'd cleared off I wanted to come out, and somebody caught hold of my sleeve. Looked round—your Igor. Didn't even recognize him at first. Shaved off his moustache. All black with smoke. I only knew him by his eyes."

"But he's alive, intact?"
 "Alive and unhurt. Of course, he asked about you. And what could I tell him? I didn't know, and that was all. We talked of you a bit, and then he said he thought you were in the 184th. Only he was afraid he might have got the number mixed. But I wrote it down, all the same. Made up my mind to get to you. Plenty of vacancies in the divisions, you know how it is. At Army Headquarters I applied for the 184th, and they jumped at it. And at divisional H.Q. I found out your regiment."

"Good egg."
 At twelve I handed over the battalion and when the moon rose, Valega and I started off for the bank. Karnaukhov and Chumak were still at the forward positions, so I was unable to say goodbye to them.

Kharlamov held out his hand.
 "If you get bored on the bank, come and see us," looking at me with his kindly Armenian eyes.

I was sorry to leave them—I'd got used to the battalion. The soldier at the entrance—he had some long, queer name that I could never remember—saluted, moving his rifle from his right hand to his left.

"You're leaving us, Comrade Battalion Commander?"

"Yes."

He coughed and saluted again, this time in farewell.

"Come and see us, don't forget us."
 "Of course, of course, I will," I said, and supporting myself on Valega, climbed out of the trench. The man with the queer name gave me a tactful shove from behind.

For three days I did nothing but eat, sleep and read. The new pillbox was fine—a miracle of underground construction. A seven-metre tunnel right into the slope. At the end, on the right, a room. A real room. All that was missing were the windows. Everything neatly faced with boards—thin, dovetailed, couldn't slip a knife in. Ceiling, floor, two beds and a table between them. Over the table an oval, Empire mirror with fat-cheeked cupids. In the corner a primus and a boiler. Mattresses, pillows, a quilt. What more could a man wish for?

In the morning Valega fed me with greasy macaroni soup, thick enough for a spoon to stand up in, and tea from our own samovar. It hummed cosily in the corner. With a pillow under my head, I lay working out crosswords in old numbers of *The Red Armyman* and reading the Moscow papers.

All quiet in the world.
 More groups called up in New Zealand. British patrol activity in Egypt. Diplomatic relations restored with Cuba and Luxemburg. Allied aircraft carried out small raids on Laekh, Salamaya, Buna in New Guinea and Timor Island. Operations against the Japanese in the Suen-Stanley sector slightly more intensive. American troops arrived in Monrovia, capital of Liberia. In Madagascar, too, British troops moving somewhere, occupying something, fighting somebody, difficult to make out quite who, and even taking prisoners.

Dubrovsky at the Bolshoi Theatre. At the Maly Theatre Korneichuk's *Front*, and at the Nemirovich-Danchenko *Helen of Troy*. . .

And here, at a depth of fourteen metres, a kilometre and a half from that front line of which the whole world is talking, I feel as comfortable and peaceful as though I were in the rear. Can there be a greater peace? Lighted streets, trams, trolleybuses, just turn on a tap and you see running water. . . Strange. . .

And I lie there staring at the ceiling and thinking of lofty matters, of how everything is relative, how the ideal thing for me just now is this pillbox with the messin of macaroni—if only it were hot, while before the war I needed all sorts of suits and striped ties, and grumbled in the bread shop if the bread I bought wasn't well baked. . . And can it be that after the war, after all these bombings, we shall again. . . and so life goes on. . .

After a time I became tired of staring at the ceiling and thinking of the future, and went out.

After looking at a thick pipe, whose origin and purpose I did not know, running along the whole shore, I sat swinging my legs, smoking a mixture strong enough to knock you down, and that made me catch my breath, enjoying the last rays of sunshine, the blue sky, the church on the opposite bank, and thinking. . . No, I didn't think, my mind was a blank. I just smoked and swung my legs.

The whiskered assistant platoon commander Garkusha approached. I showed him my watch, for some reason or other it had stopped. He

examined it, shook it, said that it was no good, and right there, at my feet, laid a board across his knees and began to mend it. The movements of his fingers were amazingly delicate and precise, although you would have expected the watch to be smashed at the first touch of his calloused hands.

I could never decide on his trade before the war. He was twenty-six, and had found time to be a watchmaker, a stove builder, a diver working for Epron,¹ and even a circus acrobat, and to be married three times. He wrote regularly to all three of his former wives, although two of them had married again.

He talked little, but answered questions willingly. I kept asking him about himself, for something to do, and he replied in a business-like manner, as though filling out a form, never withdrawing his attention from the watch for an instant. Only once he went into the tunnel to see what the sappers were doing.

Then Astafyev appeared—the assistant chief of staff for operational matters. Young, elegant, with *Eugene Onegin* sideboards and an empty stare. He spoke with a guttural “r” like a Frenchman—evidently thought it suited him. I had known him for two days, but for some reason he considered me his friend, and called me George. His own name was Hippolyte, which was a very fitting one, I thought. He reminded me vaguely of Tolstoy’s Hippolyte Kuragin. Just as limited and sure of himself. He was lecturer on history at Sverdlovsk University. When he smoked, he extended his little finger elegantly and blew out the smoke, rounding his mouth to an “o”.

He was conscious of the demands of his profession and was already collecting material for a future history.

“You realize how interesting it is, George?” he said, leaning elegantly on the pipe, after first blowing the dust off. “It is just at this time, in the seething welter of events, that it must not be forgotten. And particularly by us, participants in these events, educated, cultured men. Years will pass and people will pay thousands for some half-erased infantry map from our platoon commander and examine it through a magnifying glass. Isn’t that right?”

He took hold of my button and began twisting it between his thumb and forefinger.

“And you’ll help me, George, won’t you? One can’t rely on Abrosimov or the others, you see that yourself. They aren’t interested in anything except carrying out orders or taking some knoll or other.”

He smiled slightly, with the air of a man who does not for a moment believe that anyone could disagree with him.

The devil alone knows. . . Perhaps he’s right. But at the moment he irritates me and gets on my nerves—his sideboards, and “George”, and his pink nails that he keeps cleaning with his pocket knife.

A line of yellow-winged Junkers appeared over the slope. Squinting at them, Astafyev gestured gracefully with his hand.

“Well, I must go. . . Up to the ears in forms. Twenty a day. Divisional H.Q.’s

gone crazy. Look in, George,” and he disappeared into his shelter.

The Junkers formed and began diving over the Red October.

The tip of his tongue thrust out, Garkusha pushed some microscopic wheel into my watch with his pincers.

The sound of knives was heard in the officers’ kitchen. Evidently there would be rissoles for dinner.

17

November began with heavy morning frosts and winter uniforms issued at last. Caps with ear flaps, quilted jackets and trousers, woolen puttees, gloves of fluffy rabbit fur. In a few days they said we would be issued felt boots and fur waistcoats. We transferred the stars from our summer caps, and abandoned our summer habit of washing in the Volga and began counting the days to spring.

Sometimes Chumak visited us—he was living a dozen yards away—he brought cards and we would settle down to play. Sometimes we would go to listen to his gramophone.

From time to time Lazar, the paymaster, would come over from the other bank, and stop over with us. Valega would spread out his greatcoat between the beds and himself settle down by the stove. Lazar told us all the news from the other side; according to him, it was planned to withdraw us for reforming—to Leninsk, or even Siberia. We knew that it was all just talk, that we would not be withdrawn anywhere, but we pretended to believe him—it was pleasanter to believe it than to doubt—and made all sorts of plans for a peaceful life in Krasnoufmsk or Tomsk. First in all these dreams came pelmeny,¹ sour cream, and of course, girls.

Once a Messerschmidt fell on the position held by our regiment. Nobody knew who had brought it down, but in the evening reports of three battalions we read: “With accurate rifle and machine gun fire, our battalion shot down an enemy airplane.” It fell near the Meat Packing Plant, and despite firing and the officers’ shouts, a literal pilgrimage began. In half an hour Chumak had brought a beautiful watch with luminous hands and a large piece of plexiglass. In a week we were all swaggering about with huge transparent cigarette holders, Garkusha’s work. He was swamped with orders. Even the major, who had three pipes and never smoked cigarettes ordered a very special holder with a metal band.

18

On the evening of the sixth Karnaukhov rang me up.

“Jerry’s keeping quiet. I’m bored. And today we’re having meat rissoles. Tomorrow’s holiday². Come on over. There’s vodka, too.”

I didn’t need asking twice. We drank a couple of hundred grams each—Shiryayev,

¹ Small Siberian meat dumplings.

² November 7th—the anniversary of the Socialist Revolution of 1917.

¹ Epron—Marine Salvage Service.

Karnaukhov and I. Then Farber arrived. Shirayev poured him out a full mug. Without saying a word Farber drank it off in great gulps, as though it were water, and put the mug back on the table.

"That's the style!..." laughed Shirayev. "I didn't think you had it in you. Have another?"

Farber shook his head.

"No thanks. I don't like vodka."

"And tosses it down like a good 'un," Shirayev laughed again. He shook the bottle till the vodka bubbled like seltzer water. "Grand thing, vodka, eh, Engineer? White, transparent, stinking, but grand... You're wrong not to like it, Farber, damn it, man, you're wrong."

He shook the bottle again and then put it down on the table.

"Remember the time we drank near Kuybysk? That last night... In my dugout. And ate fried potatoes. My Philip was a sabster at frying spuds. Remember Philip? I lost him. Near Kantemirovka. A decent fellow, he was..."

He turned the mug round and round in his hands—a huge brass one holding a good litre. Even Chumak asked not to fill it up.

"And what were you thinking about then? Eh? Yurka? When we were on the bank? The regiment had gone, and we were sitting there watching the rockets. What were you thinking of then?"

"Well, how can I say..."

"You can, but you won't... I know. It was lousy. Lousy as hell. Right? And then that village, you remember, the old man that gave us water? 'You don't want to fight,' he said. 'Strong healthy men, but you don't want to.' And we didn't know what to say. We didn't understand it all ourselves. I wish he were here now, that gap-toothed old fellow."

He stopped suddenly, and his eyes narrowed and looked sharp. That was just the way they had looked when he had heard that two of his men had gone off.

"But tell me, Engineer, did you ever have that sort of feeling during the retreat? That it's the end... All smashed... Nothing left. Did you? I had it once. When we were crossing the Don. You know what it was like there? Walking on each other's heads. There was a captain, another sapper, his battalion had fixed up the crossing there—we tried to get some sort of order. A pontoon bridge, rickety, all holes and cracks after the bombing. Lorries crossed one by one, up to their wheels in water. Managed it somehow. Fixed up a queue. And suddenly some major in a tank helmet comes along in a jeep. Gets right to the bridge and stands up and begins shouting at me: 'What the devil do you mean, holding me up? The German tanks are three kilometres off! And you here making rules!' You know, I was thunderstruck. And he with a revolver in his hand, red-faced, eyes protruding. Well, I thought, if a major's talking that way, then it must be bad... And the lorries started crowding on each other. I could see my captain clean knocked off his feet. And the devil alone knows—I must have gone crazy for a moment. I jumped

onto the jeep and lashed out into his blasted face—again and again, three times. Snatched the revolver and gave him all eight barrels... And it turned out there were no tanks anywhere near. And the driver'd disappeared somewhere. Maybe that was a Jerry, a provocateur, eh?"

"May have been," I answered.

Shirayev fell silent. He shook the bottle again and then poured some vodka into the mug. But he did not drink it. He sat staring ahead of him. I could hear somebody swearing over the telephone.

"But what a will he has..." said Shirayev, without raising his eyes. "God almighty..."

"Who has?" I asked, perplexed.

"Why, Stalin, of course." He drank off the mug in a gulp. "To stand up under two retreats like that. Just think. In '41 and again now... To be able to drive them from Moscow. And to hold on here. How long have we been holding on? Over two months? And the Germans can't do a thing with all their Junkers and Heinkels. And that after the breakthrough, and what a breakthrough... After July... What must he have felt like? Can you imagine it? After all, it's his second year in harness. And he thinks for everybody. We here, we hold some five or six hundred metres and we're cursing. This is wrong, and that's bad, and the machine gun's stuck. But he has to think of the whole front... Probably doesn't even have time to read the papers. What d'you think, Kerzhentsev, does he have time for them or not?"

"I don't know. I guess he finds time somehow."

"You think so? Eh, I doubt it. We're all right. You sit in a pillbox, smoking, and if anything doesn't suit you, you go out and raise hell, yes, and sometimes wave your revolver about... Yes, and you know it all off—what each man's like, and every hummock and every knoll, you've been over it all plenty times. But what's he got? A map, and flags on it. Make something of that. And got everything to remember—where they're advancing, where they're holding a line, where they're retreating. And see—he holds us all..." Shirayev broke off. "Play something, Karnaukhov. The guitar's getting lonely hanging there with nothing to do."

Karnaukhov took the guitar down from the wall. The previous day the battalion scouts had found it in one of the half-ruined houses. It had a blue silk ribbon with a poker-work inscription: "To dear Vitya, a keepsake from Valya."

"You know—something Gipsy."

Shirayev stretched out more comfortably on the pallet, drawing up his legs, in their chrome-leather topboots with the snugly fitting shafts.

"How's it there up front, Lyoshka? Quiet?"

"All quiet, Comrade Senior Lieutenant," replied lop-eared Lyoshka, with forced heartiness, so that nobody should think that he had dozed. "Brought supper to the fifth. The men grumbled because it was thin..."

"One of these days I'll give that corporal hell. If he comes during the night, wake me. Well, come on, Karnaukhov."

Karnaukhov struck a chord. He had a very pleasant, ringing voice, something between

baritone and tenor, and an excellent ear for music. He sang softly, but with enjoyment, sometimes even closing his eyes. All the songs were Russian, dreamy, many I had never heard before. He sang well. And his face was pleasant to look at. Rather coarsely-moulded, but with something bright and real about it. Shaggy brows. Blue eyes—sensible, calm-looking, and always the same—with a kind of inner smile that never left them. Even on the knoll they had smiled.

Farber sat there, covering his eyes with his hand. Strands of wavy reddish hair escaped between the fingers. What was he thinking of? I could not guess, even dimly. Of his wife, his children, of integrals, of differentials. Or was there nothing on earth that interested him? Sometimes I was inclined to think that even death didn't worry him, to judge by the absent-minded, bored way he smoked during bombings.

After a while Karnaukhov became tired, or just felt he had sung enough. For some time we sat in silence. Then Shirayev raised himself on one elbow.

"Farber . . . were you like this before the war?"

Farber raised his head.

"Like what?"

"Like you are now."

"And what am I like now?"

"The devil alone knows . . . I can't understand you. You don't like drinking, swearing or women . . . Look at our engineer, now. He's had a college education too."

Farber smiled very slightly.

"I don't quite understand what a college education has to do with drinking and women."

"It's not what it has to do with it," Shirayev sat up on the edge of the pallet, knees apart. "I just don't understand how anybody can get along at the front without vodka. And without swearing. How do you manage without it? Karnaukhov's a quiet, modest sort of chap—you needn't listen, Karnaukhov—but he can let fly till the air's blue."

"Yes, I suppose, I'm not very good at that," Farber replied.

Shirayev laughed.

"Don't think I'm trying to lead you astray. Or teach you to curse. God forbid. It's just that I don't understand how it comes about . . . Can you swim?"

"Swim? No, I can't."

"Ride a bicycle?"

"No, I can't do that either."

"Well, have you ever bashed a fellow in the mug?"

"Why can't you leave the fellow alone?" Karnaukhov came to his rescue. "Go and talk to Chumak, about all that. He'll tell you all you want."

"I've hit a man in the face," Farber said calmly and rose.

"You have? Who?"

"I'm going now," said Farber, ignoring the question, and fastening his greatcoat.

"No, but tell me who you hit?"

"It's not interesting. . . I'm going." And he went.

"A queer chap," said Shirayev, rising.

Karnaukhov smiled. He had two dimples, like a child.

"I went to him yesterday. I was on the way from the bank. He was sitting, writing. A letter, I suppose. He was finishing the fourth page of an exercise book. In tiny writing. I badly wanted to read it."

Shirayev gave me a barely perceptible wink.

"But maybe it wasn't a letter?"

"What else?"

"Verses, perhaps."

Karnaukhov reddened.

"What are you blushing for?"

"I'm not blushing," and reddened still more.

Shirayev suppressed a smile and said nothing for a moment, his eyes fixed on Karnaukhov.

"Well, and what are yours like?"

"My what?"

"Verses, of course."

"What verses?"

"D'you think we don't know! In that exercise book. The one with the cloth cover. That time in his dugout, Kerzhentsev, you remember?"

Karnaukhov was pressed to the wall.

"Oh, that's just . . . to pass away the time."

"To pass away the time. . . You're all the same—to pass away the time. I suppose Pushkin wrote to pass away the time, too. I drink vodka to pass away the time, and you write verses. Your own, of course—confess?"

"Oh, let's have a drink," and Karnaukhov measured a third of the bottle with his fingers, then poured it out into the mug.

Half an hour later Karnaukhov and I left. We parted at the semaphore—his way lay right, mine left.

"But read me your verses sometime, all the same," I said, as we parted.

"Sometime . . ." he replied vaguely, and disappeared into the darkness.

19

It was a dark night, not a star visible. Just some dim, vague patches. There was scattered firing on the height.

The vodka had begun making itself felt. My feet got caught in all kinds of rubbish. Once I nearly fell—got tangled up in some wires.

Somebody was sitting beside a wrecked bridge. A cigarette burned dimly.

"What devil's that smoking?"

"It can't be seen from here anyway," a muffled voice replied from the darkness. Farber's voice.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing. Getting a breath of air."

I went up to him.

"A breath of air?"

"A breath of air."

For some reason I sat down. Farber said nothing more. Just sat and smoked. I too lighted up, and we sat in silence. I did not know what to talk to him about.

"There'll be a concert soon," Farber said suddenly.

"I don't think so," I replied. "Their aces

have been quiet for two days, for some reason."

"No, that isn't what I mean, I was talking of a real concert. There's a loudspeaker been put up on the other side. It gives the news. And then a concert. There was one at this time yesterday."

"From Moscow, or what?"

"I suppose it was from Moscow."

A file of soldiers passed, one after the other—about ten of them, carrying mines and ammunition. I could hear them cursing as they stumbled, and the rubble slipping and sliding under their feet. In twenty minutes they would return, and half an hour later they would pass again, stumbling and cursing the darkness, the iron lying about, Hitler, and the corporal who made them carry four battalion mines at once. They would make six or seven trips during the night, and all they had brought would be used up during the day. And as soon as the sun sank—back to the bank again, from the bank to the firing lines, from the mines to the bank—all night long.

"How's things in the company?" I asked.

"All right," Farber replied indifferently. "No special changes."

"How many men have you now?"

"Just the same. We never seem to bring it to more than eighteen or twenty. And there's practically none left of the old lot that came over with us."

"And the replacements?"

"What are they worth?"

"Green kids?"

"Never seen a rifle before. Lost one of 'em yesterday. A mine went off in his hands."

"M'yes . . ." I said. "Rotten thing, war." Farber didn't answer. He took a tobacco box from his pocket, rolled a cigarette, and lit it from the old stub. For a moment his thin face, bony nose and the lines by his mouth were visible in the glow.

"Have you ever thought that life's a damn, silly thing?" asked Farber. He could not let his cigarette going—the cigarette butt was small and it crumbled.

"Life or war?" I asked.

"No, life in general."

"That's a big question. . . Of course, there's plenty that's senseless about it. But just in what connection. . ."

"None in particular. . . Just philosophizing. A sort of balancing of accounts."

"Isn't it a bit early?"

"Of course it is, but you can come to some sort of conclusions."

He slowly crushed the stub under his heel. The spark was pressed into the ground and glowed there for a long time between his feet.

"Haven't you ever thought of your past life?"

"How d'you mean?"

"Doesn't it seem to you that to a certain extent we lived like ostriches?"

"Ostriches?"

"If you're looking for a comparison, that's about the best. We hardly ever took our heads out of the sand."

"Explain."

"I'm talking about war. About us and war. When I say 'us' I'm thinking of you and me, people who had no direct connection with

military matters before the war. In a word—you knew that there'd be a war sometime?"

"I suppose I did."

"You don't 'suppose'—you knew. And what's more, you knew that you yourself would be in it."

He puffed on his cigarette several times, blowing out the smoke noisily.

"Before the war you were officer on the reserve. Isn't that right? Army group 34. . . Higher civilian training or something of that kind."

"Army group 34. . . Reserve platoon commander."

I had never heard Farber talk so much before. It must have been the vodka.

"Training corps day once a week. And you did all your best to cut it. In the summer—camp. Right—turn! Left—turn! Quick—march! The commanders wanted smart turns, ringing songs. Out on tactical training, you took cover in the bushes and went to sleep, smoked, looked at the watch—how long till dinner. I don't think I'm far out, am I?"

"Not far, to tell the truth."

"And that's just the point. . . We left it to others. At the May Day parade we stood on the pavement, hands in pockets, looked at the tanks and the aircraft and the soldiers marching in ranks. . . Eh, that's grand! Eh, aren't we strong! And that was all we thought about then. Isn't that right? But that some day we might be walking on a dusty road instead of asphalt, with a knapsack on our backs, and be responsible for the lives—well not of hundreds, maybe, but of dozens of men. . . Did we ever think of that then?"

Farber spoke slowly, even lazily, with frequent pauses, inhaling the smoke of his cigarette after every sentence. Outwardly he appeared perfectly calm, but there was something intangible—perhaps his frequent puffs of smoke, perhaps the uneven pauses, perhaps the furrowed brow vaguely seen in the light of his cigarette—that made me sense that he had been wanting to unburden himself of all this for a long time, but either there had been nobody to talk with, or there had been no suitable moment, or no time, or the devil knows what. I could feel that he was agitated, but like many men of his type—silent and reserved—his agitation did not show itself outwardly—on the contrary, it tightened his self-control.

I said nothing. Smoked and listened. Farber continued.

"On the fourth day of the war I found thirty bright young fellows drawn up in two lines before me—carpenters, turners, smiths, tractor drivers—and I was told to take over command. Teach them. That was in the training battalion."

"Sappers?"

"Yes, sappers."

"You're a sapper then by rights?"

"Yes. Or rather, I was."

"Then how did you land in the infantry?"

"I was in the mortars before that. After the Kharkov trip I had to go over to the infantry."

"I didn't know that. So we're colleagues."

"Yes," Farber smiled and continued. "Well, so I was told to take over command and train them. A timetable: mining—four hours, for-

tifications—four hours, roads and bridges—four hours. And there they stood. Shifting from foot to foot, looking at their equipment thrown down under the trees, standing and waiting to hear what I had to tell them. And what could I tell them? I only knew that T.N.T. looked like soap, and dynamite like jelly, that trenches can be dug profile and semi-profile, and that if anybody asked me how many parts there were in a rifle I'd scratch my head and then make some wild guess."

He paused. . . Rummaged in his pocket for his tobacco box. I had never seen him smoke so much before—one after the other.

"And whose fault was it all? Who was to blame? Uncle—as the old folks used to say? No, not any uncle. . . It was my own fault. I quite simply hadn't been interested in learning military matters before the war. I'd looked on the month in camp as a duty—got to go, can't be helped—but a most unattractive duty. . . Not my job, and all that sort of thing. . . My job's mathematics—and so on. Science. . ."

Farber fumbled in his pocket.

"Where'll we get a light?" he said. "I've used up all my matches."

"And your stub's out?"

"Yes."

"We'll have to wait till the men come along again. They'll be going back to the bank soon."

"Yes, that's what we'll have to do."

So we waited. After a moment's pause, Farber continued in the same calm, even, weary voice.

"I trained them for four months. Have you any idea what that meant? What could I teach them? There was only one textbook on explosives for the whole battalion. And there was nothing else. No other reading matter on the subject at all. I used to cram all night, and then in the morning I'd explain to the men the construction of a mine when I'd never even held one in my hands. . . Br-r-r. . . It gives me the creeps just to think of it."

A file of soldiers passed by and we asked for a light. One of them squatted to strike his flint and steel. We lighted up, then the men went on. One after the other, they disappeared into the darkness—clumsy figures, with greatcoats over quilted jackets.

Farber turned his head.

"A grouser, eh?" he said very quietly.

Up to that moment he had not turned to me, but had stared straight ahead. Now in the darkness I could feel the gaze of his short-sighted eyes.

"Who's a grouser?" I asked.

"Me, of course. That's what you're thinking, I suppose. Grumbling, complaining. Right?"

I could not find the right words at once. To a certain extent he was right. What's the use of talking about the past? There's sense in analyzing what's past, or rather, what's wrong with the past, only if the analysis helps put the present or the future right.

"I look at it this way. It's hard to live if you keep thinking of past mistakes all the time, and blaming yourself for them. Blame doesn't help I fancy you know all about a rifle now, and can teach the men how to use it, too."

"I guess you're right." A pause. "But

you know. . . Before the war, if I'd met. . . well, say Shiryayev—I'd never have thought that the time would come when I'd be envying him."

"And you envy him now?"

"I certainly do." Another pause. "I can find my way about all right in questions of higher mathematics. Studied for eight years, after all. But such an elementary problem as catching a corporal who steals the men's food. . . that's almost insoluble as far as I'm concerned."

"You like criticizing yourself."

"Maybe. I think you're probably the same, only you don't talk about it."

"But all the same, why do you envy Shiryayev?"

"Why?" He rose, took a step or two, came back and sat down again. Everything was amazingly silent about us. Only a machine gun spitting away now and then, without any particular enthusiasm, somewhere far off beyond the Red October.

"Because when I look at him I feel my own deficiency clearly. That seems ridiculous to you. But it's so. He's a simple fellow, no complexes, it costs him nothing to ask if I know how to swim or ride a bicycle. It never occurs to him that those questions may hit me on a sore spot. I lied when I said I'd struck a man in the face. I've never hit anybody. I never liked fighting, I never liked physical training or sports. And now you see. . ."

He suddenly fell silent. Sniffed loudly. A nervous habit, probably. I was gradually beginning to understand him. To understand his reserve, his reticence and sullenness.

"It's not so bad," I said, trying to find something consoling to say. I recalled how I had shouted at him when I had been battalion commander. "War's hard on everybody."

"Good Lord! Is that how you understand me?" His voice even shook and broke with agitation. "I was offered a job at the front H.Q.—not a bad job at all. I know foreign languages. I was offered a post in intelligence—examining prisoners. And then you say—war's hard on everybody. . ."

I felt that I had put my foot into it.

"Are you married?" I asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing. Just wondered."

"Yes, I am."

"Any children?"

"No."

"And how old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Twenty-eight. I'm twenty-eight too. You had friends?"

"Yes, I had, but. . ." he stopped.

"You needn't tell me if you don't want to. I'm not cross-examining you. Just. . . I always feel you're kind of lonely."

"Oh, that's what you're getting at. . ."

"Yes. It'll soon be six weeks we've known each other. And today's the first time we've really talked."

"Yes, today. . ."

"One gets the sort of impression that you stand aside, avoid people."

"Maybe. . ." After another silence: "In general, I'm not a good mixer. At least

people don't think me one. I don't like vodka, can't sing, and I'm a poor officer."

"You're wrong there."

"Ask Shirayev."

"Shirayev doesn't dislike you at all."

"It isn't a matter of disliking. But after all, this isn't very interesting."

"But I think it is. I'll be frank—the first time I saw you—remember, on the bank there, after we'd crossed?"

Farber stopped me with a gesture.

"Stop!" and he touched my knee. "Do you hear?"

I listened. Solemnly, now fading, now louder, as the wind carried the sound, the vibrating notes of flute and violin came from across the Volga. It floated over the water, over the ravaged town, silent now, over us, over the Germans, beyond the trenches, the front line, Mamayev Kurgan.

"You recognize it?"

"Lord knows. . . Seems familiar. . . Very familiar. . . Not Chaikovsky?"

"Chaikovsky. The *Andante Cantabile* from the Fifth Symphony. Second Movement."

We sat listening in silence. A machine gun began rattling behind us—monotonously, insistently, like a sewing machine. Then it stopped.

"This bit . . ." said Farber, touching my knee again. "It's like a cry. You hear? It's not like that in the *Finale*. The same melody, but not like this. You like the Fifth?"

"Yes."

"I do too. . . Even more than the Sixth. Although the Sixth is always considered the most—what shall I say? . . . Now the waltz is coming. Let's keep quiet and listen to the music."

We kept quiet right to the end. I remembered Kiev again. The Tsar's Garden, the chestnuts, the limes, Lucyá, brightly coloured flowers, the conductor with something white in his buttonhole. . . .

Then a bomber came over—a heavy night one, with three engines. For some reason we'd dubbed it "Tuberculosis". It roared monotonously over our heads. Ours.

"Funny, isn't it?" says Farber, getting up.

"What's funny?"

"All this . . . Chaikovsky, greatcoats, the 'Tuberculosis'. . . ."

We rose and went towards Farber's dugout. The vodka had worn off, and I no longer stumbled. The bomber was hovering over one spot. A searchlight finger was stabbing the sky from beyond Mamayev.

I did not return to the bank, but spent the night with Farber.

20

On the evening of the seventh the papers came, with Stalin's speech. We had been waiting for it a long time. When it was broadcast, we had not been able to make anything out—atmospherics. Only "there will be a holiday on our street too." And that sentence had been discussed in all the dugouts and trenches.

Stalin spoke on November 6th.

On the 7th, the Allies landed in Algiers and Oran.

On the 10th they advanced in Tunisia and Casablanca.

On the 11th, at seven in the morning, landing operations in North Africa ceased. The agreement was signed between Darlan and Eisenhower. The same day and the same hour, German troops, at Hitler's orders, crossed the demarcation line at Chalon-sur-Saone and moved towards Lyons. At fifteen hours, Italian troops entered Nice.

On the 12th the Germans occupied Marseilles and landed in Tunisia.

On the 13th the Germans bombed Stalingrad for the last time. Forty-two Junkers 87's flew over three times, bombing our heavy artillery in the Krasnaya Sloboda district on the right bank of the Volga. And flew away. And the air was silent—an unaccustomed, amazing silence.

After eighty days of continual roaring and smoke, after bombings lasting without a break from seven in the morning till seven at night, something incomprehensible was happening. The cloud lifted from over the Red October. It was no longer necessary to crane our necks every moment, looking for those repulsive triangles in the sky. Only the reconnaissance planes still appeared regularly in the morning and at sunset, and sometimes a Messerschmidt would roar over our heads and disappear almost at once.

Jerry was played out. . . That was clear.

And there was lively debate in the trenches—the why and the wherefore, and could the African events be called a second front. The political officers were in demand everywhere. Our regimental political officer—Senichka Lozovoi—small, black as a beetle, always excited—was run off his legs. He was hardly ever on the bank—he would run to H.Q. for a moment to listen to the broadcast, and then back again. And all along the forward lines it would be: "Senichka, come here! Senichka, we need you!" Everybody called him Senichka, officers and soldiers too. The commissar told him off for it once.

"What's the meaning of this, Lozovoi? You're a lieutenant, and they all call you 'Senichka'. . . That's not correct."

He only smiled sheepishly.

"What can I do? They're used to me. I've told them again and again. But they forget. . . And I forget too."

So he remained Senichka, and the commissar washed his hands of it.

"Works like the devil. . . Well, how can I bawl him out?"

Senichka really did work like the devil. He had so much initiative and imagination that one wondered where he found room for it all, a small, fragile chap like that. There was one time when he was busy with a pipe. My sappers made him a huge tin megaphone, and every day he'd take an interpreter and propagandize the Germans from the forward positions. They were furious and opened fire on him, but he would tuck his trumpet under his arm and off he would go to some other place.

Then he went over to leaflets and caricatures of Hitler. They weren't at all bad ones. Just at that time the regiment had received a consignment of shells and mortar bombs packed with leaflets. When they came to an

end, he spent a great deal of time trying out old tins and even some special sort of rubber sling affair to hurl them. But nothing came of that effort—the tins did not reach the Germans. Then he began making dummy figures, and the whole division took up the idea. The men were very keen on it. They would make some sort of a Hitler out of rags and a German uniform, with a moustache and a hanging lock of dyed tow, and put a notice on it: "Fire at me!" Then during the night they would go out with the scouts and place it in No Man's Land. The Germans were furious—all day they would be machine-gunning their Führer, and when night came they would steal the dummy. They stole it all right, but they lost three men doing it. Our men would hold their sides: "Eh, Senichka," and insist on giving him their tots of vodka. He was very popular.

Unfortunately we soon lost him. As the best agitator in the division, he was sent to Moscow for a special training course. We kept waiting for a letter from him, and when it came at last, H.Q. of the first battalion—where he had spent the most time—took the whole day to write an answer. In the end it was no more than two small pages, and mostly questions at that ("everything's the same here, doing a spot of fighting"), but the signatures took all of four pages—about a hundred of them.

For a long time the men used to talk about him.

"When's that course finishing?" they would ask, and dreamed of Senichka coming back to the regiment. But he never came—he was sent to the northern front, I have heard.

The nineteenth of November is a memorable day for me. First of all, it was my birthday. When I was a child, that always meant cakes and presents, later on—a party and drinks; but it was always celebrated somehow. Even the previous year, in the reserve regiment, we'd drunk home-distilled vodka and eaten rosy baked milk covered with thick reddish-gold cream, from a huge enamelled bowl. And this time too Valega had something up his sleeve.

In the evening he made me go to the bath-house—a rickety, roofless hut on the bank of the Volga; he gave me clean underwear, which was even ironed, and then disappeared somewhere for the whole of the next day, appearing only for a moment—very full of business, looking for something, and carrying a mysterious bundle under his arm. I did not interfere with him.

In the evening I went to Ustinov, the divisional engineer. He met me very ceremoniously—he was always a great lover of formalities. In general, I have noticed that when brain workers come to the front, they generally fall into one of two categories. Some are crushed and tormented by the uniform and all it implies—everything hangs on them like a sack—tunic bulging, buckle somewhere at the side, jackboots three sizes too large, greatcoat humped on the shoulders, themselves tongue-tied or stammering. But others, on the contrary, take a great liking for all the outward forms of army life—they salute with gusto, they lard their talk with "Comrade Lieutenant," "Comrade Captain," swag-

ger about their familiarity with the regulations and the markings of our aircraft and the Germans, and when they hear an artillery or mortar shell, never fail to say: "Regimental one coming over," or "The 152's have started." When talking of themselves, they always say "We front-line men . . . with us at the front. . . ."

Ustinov belonged to the second category. One felt that he was rather proud of his accuracy and literal fulfillment of every letter of the regulations. And he rather liked it despite his middle age and his glasses—all this red tape. Whomever he might greet, he always rose, stood properly at attention addressing senior officers by their full ranks.

This time he met me with especial solemnity. He was stiff and restrained—his taut expression, knitted brows, and the theatrical gesture with which he waved me to be seated—everything indicated that today our conversation would not be confined to firing tables and plans.

I sat down on the proffered stool. He seated himself opposite me. For some moments nothing was said. Then he raised his eyes and looked at me over his glasses.

"You are already informed of the latest events, Comrade Lieutenant?"

"What events?"

"How's that? You know nothing?" His brows were arched in surprise. "The IRC hasn't said anything?" According to his favourite terminology, IRC meant Infantry Regimental Commander—in this case my Major Borodin.

"No. He's said nothing."

Slowly, almost reluctantly, his brows lowered to their normal position. His fingers twirled a long, well-sharpened pencil with a protector.

"At six today we launch an offensive."

The pencil described a circle on the paper in front of him, then placed a dot in the centre, as though emphasizing the importance of his statement.

"What offensive?"

"An offensive along the whole front," he said slowly, articulating every syllable. "Including ours. D'you understand what that means?"

So far there was only one thing I understood—that there were only six hours until the beginning of the offensive, and that the promised rest for my men that night—the first in the past two weeks—was irrevocably lost.

"The assignment for our division is limited, but it is important," he continued. "To capture the oil cisterns. You understand how much responsibility that places upon us? At 4:30 the artillery barrage begins. All the frontal artillery will take part, the whole left bank. The time at our disposal—it's now seven minutes past eight—is very limited—about ten hours. Your regiment will receive a company from the sappers' battalion. You will give each infantry battalion one platoon of this company, with the object of engineering reconnaissance and demining the enemy fields. The regimental sappers you will station along the way through our own fields."

The sheet of paper lying before him gradually filled with neat even lines.

"Never for a moment forget to keep count. Each mine removed must be noted down, every new field discovered must be definitely marked in relation to some point of orientation, and without fail to a permanent one—do you understand?—not a barrel or a gun, but something permanent. A report of the work done to be sent in every three hours by a special runner."

He continued for a long time giving minute instructions, not omitting a single detail, distributing my time almost by the hour and minute. I wrote in silence. The divisional sappers were already preparing for the job—cleaning their tools, wrapping explosives, making fuses.

I listened, wrote, and glanced at my watch. At nine I left. I would arrange with the Commander of Company 2—the company that always worked with me—that they should come to me at 2 a.m.

The table in my dugout was unrecognizable. In the middle of the table stood four open half-litre bottles, sausage cut into thin wafers, chocolate in brown and gold wrappers, a packet of Pushkin biscuits, pickled herring and—the greatest delight—meat steaming in a mess-tin, filling the tent with its appetizing odour.

Valega had brought back a hare—a real hare. He had gone over to the other side especially for it. Chumak was expected. There was my favourite, a tin of condensed milk.

Truth to tell, at that moment I would have much preferred to sit down, eat a piece of the hare and drink wine, rather than make preparations for an offensive. But there was nothing to be done about it, it couldn't be helped. . . .

We poured ourselves out half-tumblers and drank them down without any ceremony of clinking glasses. Then we tackled the hare. It was rather tough, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that it was hare. I began to feel more cheerful.

In a few minutes the staff liaison officer arrived. Abrosimov wanted me.

The major and Abrosimov were in a huddle over maps. There was no room to turn round in the dugout—battalion commanders, staff officers, commanders of special groups, Chumak in his round cap, unbuttoned, with his striped singlet gleaming.

"Well, engineer, it's all off, eh?"

"All off."

"The devil it is. . . Put it away in the wardrobe. . . When we come back, we'll help out," and he laughed gaily, eyes shining.

I edged my way through to the table. Nothing very comforting. Before the beginning of the attack, a new Observation Post had to be made for the Regimental Commander. The old one was no use—the oil cisterns could not be seen from there. Just what I expected. And of course, demining, gaps, providing for infantry action.

"See you don't slip up, Engineer," said Merodin, admonishing me with his pipe. It's you that sowed those potatoes along the forward positions, nobody else knows where they are. . . Our men may go up on them. And every man counts—you know that yourself. . . ."

I could sense that he was excited, though

he was trying to keep calm. His pipe went out every moment, and the matches would not strike—the box was no good.

"And cover the Observation Post with rails. And see there's a stove. My rheumatism's talking back at me again. I'll be there at five sharp. So get a move on."

I went.

21

At four o'clock I went to the forward positions. The Germans were lighting up the front line and machine-gunning it constantly—just as though they sensed something coming.

I went round the battalions. Agnityev and Garkusha had finished the passages, and were in the blindages smoking. I went to the Observation Post. While I was still a good distance off I could hear Lisagor cursing in a whisper. He was sitting on top of the dugout, laying rails with the huge Tatar Tugiev. Both of them were breathing heavily and swearing. German bullets were whizzing by almost over their heads. The machine gun was fifty metres away—that was why they flew over, to strike somewhere far behind.

I made my way into the pillbox. Telephonists and the Regimental Commander's adjutant were there already. A blanket had been drawn over the embrasure, so that no light should show. A smoking shell case lay on the floor, and one of the telephonists was lighting the stove with spare explosives. He evidently enjoyed seeing the powder flare up, and kept throwing small pinches of it onto the flames.

Ten minutes later Lisagor came in. His face was beaded with sweat; his hands red with rust and clay.

"What's the time, Engineer?"

"Twenty past four. . . ."

"See our speed? Dead on the beginning of the barrage. . . Got any tobacco?"

I gave him a smoke. He wiped his face with his sleeve, leaving it striped like a mattress cover.

"Well—that Tugiev's a real bear. Heaves half a rail onto his shoulder and not a murmur. . . Know where we brought them from? Nearly as far back as the Meat Packing Plant. Blew 'em up into bits and brought 'em here on our shoulders. Feel there—like a cushion. A real health resort—Sochi-Matsesta. . . ."

"How many roofings have you laid?"

"Two of rails, and there was an old wooden one."

"Does it make a hump?"

"Say, d'you know how many humps there are about there? Every step there's a dugout, and if it isn't a dugout, it's a knoll."

"Any wounded?"

"Tugiev's greatcoat. Three holes. A fine lad, that is. Ought to be decorated. Digs as though it were a garden. . . Stop. . . Is that it, starting?"

We listened. Yes. There were the first salvoes from beyond the Volga. I looked at my watch. Four-thirty.

"To the trenches!" roared Lisagor. "Sight 05, they'll be plastering ours again. . . Runner, call the sappers to come back here."

The sappers crowded into the pillbox,

lighted cigarettes, and stumbled over each other's rifles and spades.

"Where's Tugiev?"

"Still back there. Up on top."

"See that? Covering it with sand. Posing it up. Get him in here, Sidelnikov. He'll get his head knocked off with a shell."

The cannonade increased. Through the badly-fitting door we could hear the shells rushing past over the pillbox. The roar of the explosions drowned out the sound of the shot. The dugout trembled, and soil trickled down from the roof.

The major, Abrosimov and the reconnaissance officer appeared. The major was breathing heavily—heart playing up, probably.

"Well, Engineer, we aren't going to get buried here?" he asked benevolently, tiny wrinkles showing round his eyes. He was already looking for his pipe.

"I don't think so, Comrade Major."

"Again... 'think'... I'll have to fine you. Five rubles for every 'think'. Got rails on?"

"Yes. Two rows."

The firing became heavier and heavier. Shots and explosions merged into one single continuous roar. The door kept banging. We fastened it with wire.

"Good work," said the major.

A shell burst somewhere quite near. Soil trickled down from the roof and the lamp flickered and nearly went out.

"Good for them that like it," said the reconnaissance officer with a rather strained smile. "Yesterday a '122 nearly went plump into Pozharsky's pillbox—the artillery chief, you know."

The major smiled, and so did I. But nobody felt very comfortable. The German forward positions were fifty metres from us—a very common dispersal radius for long-distance artillery.

We sat smoking. You can't do without tobacco at times like that.

Then the divisional sapper-scouts arrived. They had found eighteen mines and taken the sting out of them—simply taken out the sting and left the mines where they were. They go out again.

Abrosimov could not tear himself from the telephone.

Could the Germans possibly hold out under such terrific firing?

It was getting hot in the pillbox. The sides of the stove were red hot. I unfastened my coat.

"Don't put any more on," the major said to the telephonist. "It'll be getting light, and then they'll fire at the smoke."

The man went off to his own corner.

At six the firing died down. Each minute we were looking at our watches. A quarter to... Ten to... Five to...

Abrosimov was glued to the telephone.

"Get ready!"

The last scattered shots. Then silence. A terrible, unnatural silence. Ours had finished. The Germans' had not yet begun.

"Over the top!" Abrosimov shouted into the telephone.

I was at the embrasure. Against the dim grey sky I could barely distinguish the cisterns, some sort of pipes, German trenches,

a disabled tank. To the right—part of our trenches. A bird was flying past, its wings slowly flapping. They say that birds are not afraid of battles.

"Get going!" Abrosimov shouted into the telephone. He was pale, and the corner of his mouth twitched incessantly.

The major was sitting at my left, at the embrasure. Sucking his pipe. For some reason I felt cold. My hands trembled and chilled, ran down my spine. It was probably from the excitement. It's hell having nothing to do.

Figures appeared above our trenches. Running... Hurra-a-ah! Straight for the cisterns... A-a-a-ah!

I did not even hear the German machine guns start, only saw figures falling. The white puffs of mortar shells. Another machine gun—to the left.

The explosions grew more frequent. The ground was swathed in white smoke, like cottonwool, slowly dispersing. Figures on the bare grey ground—many of them, some crawling, others hugging the earth. No more running figures.

The major pulled at his pipe. Coughed. "Devil a bit they're crushed... Devil a bit..."

Abrosimov 'phoned the second battalion the third. The same thing. Hugging the ground. Couldn't raise a head for machine gun and mortar fire.

The major left the embrasure. His face looked weary, it seemed somehow to have sunken in.

"Battered them an hour and a half... And then not take it... The devils must have as many lives as a cat..."

Abrosimov was still standing with the telephone at his ear, his foot on a box, untwisting the wire with dry, nervous fingers.

"Look out through the embrasure, Engineer... Many killed? Or have they got into shell holes?"

I looked out. About twelve figures lying motionless, arms and legs spread eagle—evidently dead. Nobody else to be seen. The machine gun was firing straight at the breastworks—nothing but puffs of dust. A lousy business.

"Kerzhentsev," said the major very quietly.

"Yes, Comrade Major."

"You're doing no good here. Go to your old battalion. To Shiryayev. Help them out... And then, sucking his pipe—"You've got German communication trenches there. Shiryayev has an idea how to get them. Place machine guns and catch Jerry in the flank..."

I turned to go.

"What, are you sending him to Shiryayev? asked Abrosimov, without leaving the telephone.

"Let him go. Nothing for him to do here. We shan't take it with a frontal attack anyway."

"Yes, we shall!" yelled Abrosimov in an unnatural sort of voice, and threw down the telephone. The telephonist caught it adroitly and brought it to his ear. "We'll take it with a frontal attack all right, if they don't crawl into holes. Well, go along to the second battalion, Kerzhentsev, organize things there. Or it'll be just thinking and guessing, and

ting nowhere. . . . "Firing too heavy, keeps the men down" and so on. . . ."

His eyes, usually so calm and cold, were stended and bloodshot, his lips trembling.

"Get them up, get them up! Taking a rest, n't get their bottoms off the ground. . . ."
"Don't get so excited, Abrosimov," said the major calmly, and with a gesture to me—
"Go along, then."

I went. I made Shirayayev's Command post in short runs between bursts. The Germans were raging, firing indiscriminate, sending over all they'd got. Shirayayev was not there—at the forward positions, they said. I raced along there, and crashed to him at the dugout entrance—the same place where we had sat when we were surrounded.

"How's it going?"
Shirayayev waved his hand.
"Going. . . Half the battalion missing."
"Cut down?"

"The devil knows. . . Lying down. . . and, fighting with Abrosimov."
"Why, what's up?"

The veins of Shirayayev's neck swelled.
"What?—The major says one thing, and Abrosimov another. . . Settled everything with the major. Put everything to him clear and straight—it's like this and like this. Got common communication trenches with the Germans."

"I know. Well?"

"Well, and I made preparations all night. Laid mines to make a gap. . . The same as you did before. Placed the sappers. And then—Abrosimov rings up, no gaps, lead the attack. . . I tell him there's machine guns here. . . 'To hell with them. . . The artillery'll silence them, and the Germans are afraid of the bayonet. . . ' Well. . . ."

"How many men had you?"

"Infantry—a bit over sixty. Thirty to attack, thirty to hold the positions. And then comes Abrosimov: 'Launch a massed attack. Leave only machine gunners and mortar gunners. Take the sappers too. . . .'"

"Does the major know about it?"
"How do I know?"

Shirayayev flung himself down onto a stool. He cracked and seemed ready to come apart.
"Well, what's to be done now? The men'll be out there till evening—Jerry won't let them raise their heads. And he's starting shouting again. . . ."

I told Shirayayev what the major had said. His eyes sparkled, he jumped up, seized me by the shoulders and shook me like a rag.
"Grand! You stop here, and I'll go along once with Karnaukhov and Farber. . . . How to get the men out of the shell holes. . . ."

He seized his cap.

"If the 'phone rings, let it alone! Let the answer. Lyoshka, you say that I'm at the forward positions. Get me? That is, if it's Abrosimov."

Lyoshka nodded.

The door had barely banged behind Shirayayev when Abrosimov rang up. Lyoshka winked at me.

"They've gone, Comrade Captain. . . On-

ly just gone. . . Yes, both of them. . . Came in and went out again. . . ."

Covering the instrument with his hand, he laughed.

"Swearing. . . Why didn't you 'phone him when you came. . . ."

In half an hour Shirayayev had everything ready. In three places our trenches linked up with the German ones—one on the knoll, and two in the gully. Each one had two mined barriers. During the night Shirayayev and the sappers had extended a detonator to them. The trenches from us to the Germans had been tested and about ten mines removed.

Everything was ready. Shirayayev slapped his knee.

"Thirteen of my men have got back. We'll manage! Let them rest for the present and fire. The rest we'll send in tens to the gap. Not so bad, eh?"

His eyes were blazing. His cap white and shaggy was pulled down over one ear, and strands of hair from under it clung to his forehead.

"I'll send Karnaukhov and Farber to the knoll, and I'll go to the gully myself."

"And who'll direct operations?"

"You."

"Drop that. I'm not battalion commander now, but engineer, a headquarters representative."

"Well, what difference does that make? Take over command."

"Send Sendetsky to the gully. He's a plucky chap, you know that."

"Sendetsky? He's young. . . Besides. . . ."

We were standing in the trench by the pill-box entrance. Suddenly Shirayayev's eyes narrowed, his nose wrinkled. He seized my arm.

"Damn his hide. . . Pushing in here now."

"Who?"

Clutching at the bushes, Abrosimov was clambering up the side of the gully, followed by a runner.

Shirayayev spat and pushed his cap over his brows.

While still far off, Abrosimov began shouting.

"What the devil d'you think I sent you here for? To chew the rag, or what?"

He was panting and dishevelled.

"Phoned, 'phoned. . . if somebody'd answered. . . Do you mean to fight or not?"

He was breathing heavily, and licked his dry lips.

"It's you I'm asking—do you mean to fight or not?"

"Yes, we do," Shirayayev replied calmly.

"Then get on with it, damn you. . . What the devil are you hanging about here for? And the engineer too. . . And I running about like an errand boy. . . ."

"Permit me to explain," Shirayayev began, with the same restrained calm, but with twitching nostrils.

Abrosimov turned purple.

"I'll give you all the explanations you want."

He reached for his holster.

"Quick march into the attack!"

I felt myself beginning to seethe. Shirayayev

was breathing heavily, head bent forward, fists clenched.

"Quick march to the attack! You hear me? I shan't say it again. . . ."

His revolver was in his hand, the fingers white, bloodless.

"I'm not going into any attack till you listen to me," said Shiryayev through his teeth, with a terrible deliberation, emphasizing every syllable.

For several seconds they stood eye to eye. In another moment they would be at blows. I had never seen Abrosimov like that.

"The major ordered me to take those trenches over there. I settled it with him. . . ."

"You don't settle things in the army, you carry out orders," Abrosimov broke in. "What were my orders this morning?"

"Kerzhentsev has just confirmed. . . ."

"What orders did I give you this morning?"

"To attack."

"Where's your attack?"

"Crushed, because. . . ."

"I'm not asking why. . . ." and suddenly, again in a frenzy, he waved his revolver. "Quick march to the attack! I shoot cowards! Do you refuse to carry out an order?"

He looked as though he would go into convulsions any moment.

"All the commanders are in front. . . And you go forward too. . . I'll teach you to save your own skin. . . Thought up some sort of trenches. . . Three hours since the order was given. . . ."

I could not listen to any more. I turned and went.

22

The machine guns got us almost at once. The man running beside me seemed to fall immediately, flat, arms flung out. My initial spurt carried me into a fresh shell hole, still smelling of powder. Somebody jumped over me. Earth scattered. He fell too, and crawled off somewhere to the side, arms and legs working with lightning speed. The bullets were zipping just above the ground, striking the sand, and whining viciously. Mortar shells were going off somewhere quite near.

I lay on my side, huddled in a ball, knees to chin. My revolver was in my right hand. It was covered with sand—Valega had oiled it well the previous evening, and I had forgotten to wipe it in the morning.

There was no more "hurrah".

Where was Shiryayev? We had jumped out of the trench almost simultaneously. I had stumbled and caught some piece of projecting iron with my left hand, then I had seen his coat in front of me, off to the right. It had a large yellow patch that made it easy to detect.

The German machine guns never rested for a moment. I could tell exactly how the machine gunner was swinging his gun—like a fan—from right to left and back again.

I hugged the ground with all my might. The hole was fairly deep, but even so I felt that my left shoulder stuck out. I dug into the soil with my hands—it was soft and gave easily. But that was only the top layer—further down I found clay. Feverishly, like a dog, I burrowed in.

Tr-r-rakh! A mortar shell. Earth scattered all over me.

Tr-r-rakh! The second. Then a third and a fourth. I shut my eyes and stopped digging. They must have noticed me throwing out some soil.

I lay there hardly breathing. Somebody was groaning on my left—Oh! oh! . . . Nothing else, just that. "Oh! Oh!" Monotonously without any intonation, just that one single note. I did not know how long I had been lying there. I was afraid to stir. My mouth was full of earth, it felt gritty on my teeth. And earth all round me. I could see nothing but earth. On top—grey, fine as powder, and lower down—clay, reddish-brown, cracked, lying in piles. No grass, nothing, not even a worm, nothing but dust and clay. It would be better even if only some worm would crawl out. If I turned my head I could see the sky. That too was grey, smooth and cheerless. Probably there would be rain or snow soon. Most likely snow—my toes were freezing.

The machine gun began firing in bursts but still low, just above the ground. I could not understand how it was that I was untouched—neither killed nor wounded. To run right onto a machine gun for fifty metres was certain death. The first to jump out had been Shiryayev, Karnaukhov, Sendetsky and I. And one other, a platoon commander, one of the new ones. All I could remember was a grey strand of hair escaping from under his cap. Farber I had not seen, for some reason.

Evidently I had run a very short distance and hugged the ground at once. I could not remember what had sent me down—there had been a sudden void all round me. First running figures, and then—nobody. It must have been instinct. Loneliness is terrifying. Though I could not remember if I had been afraid. I could not even remember how and why I came to be in that shell hole.

Cramp seized my right leg—the result of the awkward position in which I was lying. First the calf knotted, then the foot, then the long muscles running up from the knee. I tried to stretch out my leg, but there was no room—I was afraid to thrust it out of the hole and I rubbed it with my hands, then I wiggled my toes, but the cramp would not cease—the shaft of my boot didn't help matters either.

The wounded man was still groaning without any letup, but more weakly now.

The Germans shifted their fire to the defences, and the bullets began passing considerably higher. They had decided to leave us alone. I raised my cap over the edge of the hole. Nobody fired at it. Supporting myself on my hand, I cautiously peered over with one eye. The Germans were near enough to shake hands. I could have tossed a stone into the wire supports in front of the trenches. The machine gun was just opposite me, I could see the black stripe of the embrasure.

I shovelled the soil up into a small pile on the German side. Now I could look round and behind me without being seen.

Our trenches were further away than the Germans'. Thirty metres, if not more. Somebody was running along them, crouching. I could just see a cap bobbing up and down. Then it disappeared. The soldier who had been running beside me was lying with arms

lung wide, his face with its wide-open eyes turned towards me. It looked as though he were pressing his ear to the ground to listen. Some paces away there was another figure—I could only see the legs in their thick woolen puttees and brown boots.

I counted fourteen bodies in all, some of them probably left from the morning attack. Neither Shiryaev nor Karnaukhov were among them—I would have known them at once. There were shell holes all round me, large and small. Something dark showed over the top of one, and then disappeared again.

The wounded man was still groaning. He was lying on his face a few paces from my hole, head towards me, his cap lying beside him. He had wavy black hair that seemed very familiar. His arms were bent and pressed to him. He was crawling. Slowly, slowly, without raising his head. Dragging himself along with one elbow, his legs dragging helplessly behind him. And groaning all the time, very quietly now. "Oh! Oh!"

I could not take my eyes off him. I did not know how to help him. I had not even a field dressing with me.

Now he was quite near. I could have reached out and touched him.

"Here, come in here," I whispered, and stretched out a hand to him.

He raised his head. Large black eyes, extended, dying. Kharlamov. . . My former chief of staff. . . Looked at me and did not know me. There was no suffering on his face, only a kind of dull apathy. Forehead, cheeks and teeth were earth-stained. Mouth open. Lips white.

"Here, come here. . ."

Bracing his elbows on the ground, he dragged himself to the edge of the hole, when his head fell, burying his face in the earth. I took him under the arms, and dragged him in. His whole body seemed soft and limp, his head hung loosely forward, his legs were absolutely lifeless.

I arranged him on the bottom with some difficulty. There was little room for two, I had to place his legs on top of mine. He lay there, head thrown back, staring at the sky, breathing slowly, heavily. His tunic and the upper part of his trousers were soaked with blood. I unfastened his belt and raised the shirt. There were two neat punctures on the right side of the abdomen. I knew that he would die.

He turned his head towards me. His lips were moving, he was trying to say something, but all I could distinguish was: "Comrade Lieutenant. . . Comrade Lieutenant. . ." I thought he recognized me. Then his head dropped back and did not raise again. He died very quietly. Just stopped breathing. I closed his eyes and covered the stern, pale face with his cap.

He had been very much afraid of death. . .

It began to snow—first tiny dusty particles, then big, fluffy snowflakes. Everything round about turned white—the ground, the prone figures, the breastworks of the trenches. My hands and feet were cold, and so were my ears—I turned my collar up.

The Germans were firing, ours were answering; every now and then a bullet would zip over my head.

There we lay—Kharlamov and I—cold, stretched out, with unmelting snowflakes on our arms. My watch had stopped, I had no means of telling how long I had been there. My hands and feet numbed, a cramp seized me again. How long could I lie there like that? Suppose I simply jumped up and ran? . . . Thirty metres—five seconds at most—get there before the machine gunner realized what was happening. After all, thirteen men had run back in the morning. . .

Something moved in the neighbouring shell hole. A grey cap stirring against the already melting snow. A head was raised for a second, then disappeared. Again it rose. Suddenly a man leaped up from the hole and ran. Ran quickly, quickly—crouching, arms pressed to his body, legs flashing.

He ran three quarters of the distance; only eight or ten metres were left. Then the machine gun got him. He staggered two or three steps more and then fell forward. There he lay, only three paces from our trenches. For some time his coat stood out grey against the snow, then it too turned white. And all the time the snow kept falling. . . falling. . .

Three more tried to run for it—almost simultaneously. One of them was in a short sweater—he must have thrown off his great-coat for greater speed. He was killed almost at the breastwork, another of them a few paces from him. The third managed to make it. For a long time the German machine gun kept pumping lead into the place where he had disappeared.

I dug a depression in the shell hole with my heels. Now I could straighten out my legs. Another one for Kharlamov's legs. They had stiffened already, the knees would not straighten, but somehow I got them in. Now we were lying side by side, extended full length, I on my side, he on his back. It was as though he were sleeping, his face covered with his cap, to keep the snow off.

The work had warmed me a little. I turned over onto my left side so as not to see Kharlamov, and dug another hole for my left hip—that made lying easier. Now I was fine, if only our long-distance guns didn't open fire on the German forward positions. And if I could only have smoked. . . Just three puffs. I had left my tobacco in Shiryaev's pillbox, only my matches rattled in their box.

I began to feel drowsy. The snow was melting under me, the grey dust changing into mud. My knees were wet, and my head was cold. I took Kharlamov's cap and covered his face with my handkerchief. Then I cleaned my revolver, to keep awake. There were only four cartridges in it, and I had no more.

What time could it be? Probably past twelve. . . And darkness fell only at six. Another six hours to lie there. . . Six hours—an eternity.

I pulled down the ear flaps of my cap and closed my eyes. To the devil with it! What would be, would be. . .

Sleep would not come. I kept feeling as though Kharlamov were moving behind me. I remembered that I ought to take his papers. That was not such an easy matter—he kept

them in his back pocket. I recalled that he had taken his card as Candidate to the Communist Party from there when he had paid his dues. It took me a long time to get them out—Kharlamov had become heavy, as though he had grown into the ground. But in the end I got them. In a small oilcloth packet neatly folded and fastened with a safety pin were his Candidate card, two letters, a certificate that was very grubby and on which the ink had run, and several photographs. These were wrapped up separately. I had never thought that Kharlamov could be tidy. At H.Q. he had always lost and forgotten everything.

I looked at the photographs. One of them showed Kharlamov with a woman. She had long wavy hair and widely-set eyes. His wife, probably. She was carrying a child—with the same large black eyes as his father's. Another one was of the same woman, alone, wearing a beret. A third was of a happy crowd taken on a river bank. One young fellow held a guitar. Kharlamov, in shorts, was lying prone. In the distance—fields and a haystack. On the back was written: "Cherkizovo, June 1939. Mura second from left."

I wrapped everything in the oilcloth again, fastened the safety pin and put it into my pocket.

A small piece of clay hit my ear. I started. A second fell by my knee. Somebody was throwing them at me. I raised my head. A broad, unshaven face with high cheekbones was peeping out of the neighbouring shell hole.

"Hey, brother... Got any matches? Or a lighter?"

"Yes."

"Throw them over, for God's sake...."

"Leave me a stub?"

"O.K."

I threw over the matchbox, but it fell two paces short. Damn the thing... The man in the shell hole reached out his hand. No, he could not get it... We could not take our eyes from that matchbox. There it lay, black on the snow, as though it were laughing at us. Then a rifle appeared. Slowly, carefully it emerged from the shell hole, moved along the snow, and twitched at the box. All this seemed to take an eternity. The box slipped, moved further away, would not catch on the sight. The man with the rifle had his mouth open with the tension. At last he managed to catch it. The head and the rifle disappeared. A fine smoke appeared above the shell hole.

"Careful," I whispered, but I think he did not hear me.

He smoked, it seemed, a good half hour, no less. I was sick with longing and envy. Then the matchbox returned to me with a short, wet fag-end. I sucked and sucked at it as long as I could, burning my lips.

"Hey! Soldier! Got a watch?" I whispered over to him.

"A quarter to twelve," came back from the hole.

I could not believe my ears... I had thought it must surely be two or three, and here it was, not yet twelve... And to cap it all, firing began again. Ours or the Germans'—the devil knew. Shells burst around us for

ten or fifteen minutes. Then they stopped and again started off.

I would have to run for it. Wait another six hours—couldn't hold out. If I was killed I'd be killed. Everybody's got to die some day....

Again the voice sounded from the shell hole:

"Pal... eh, pal...."

"What's up?"

"Let's make a run for it."

He couldn't stand it any longer either.

"All right," I replied.

We decided to do it cleverly. The other three had been killed almost at the breastwork. We would throw ourselves down before we got there. When the firing started, we would be hugging the ground. Then one spring and into the trench. Perhaps we'd make it. I slewed round towards our trenches. If only that cramp didn't get me again. The space in front was level—only one shell hole with a dead man lying beside it.

"Well, ready?"

"Ready...."

I braced my weight on my left leg, with the right knee bent. Took a last look at Kharlamov. He was lying quietly with his knee doubled up and his hands pressed to his stomach. There was nothing more he needed now....

"Let's go!"

"Let's go...."

Snow... Shell hole... Dead man... Snow again... Fling myself down... And almost immediately... rat-at-tat... I hold my breath... Rat-a-tat-tat... lie motionless. Rat-a-tat....

"Still alive?"

"Yes, still alive...."

I lie face downwards in the snow, arms flung out, left leg folded under me—easier to jump up that way. Only five or six paces to the trench. I devour that scrap of ground from the corner of my eye.

Have to wait two or three minutes, let the machine gun quieten down. It won't get us now—we're too low.

I can hear somebody walking along the trench, talking. The words are indistinguishable....

Now....

"Get ready," I say, without raising my head from the snow.

"Ready..." comes the reply from my left. I strain every muscle. My temples throb. "Go!"

Push off. Three leaps into the trench....

We sat there for a long time in the mud at the bottom of the trench and laughed. Somebody gave me a cigarette stub.

It turned out to be five o'clock. The soldier's watch had also stopped. We had been lying in the shell hole from seven till five—ten hours. It was only now that I realize that I was wildly, frantically hungry.

Next morning we buried our comrades—Kharlamov, Sendetsky, and the companion commander with the grey strand of hair. The stretcher bearers had brought them in during the night. Karnaukhov was not found. They said somebody had seen him, together with four soldiers, break through into the

erman trenches. They had probably been killed over there.

Shiryayev had crawled back himself, streaming with blood, an arm dangling helplessly. He had crawled back, with barely enough strength to drag himself over the breastwork, and immediately lost consciousness. He had been sent to the dressing station. I went there, only to hear that he had been dispatched to the base hospital on the other side of the river half an hour previously.

In all, the battalion had lost twenty-six men—almost a half, not counting the wounded. Farber had taken over command of the battalion. He was the only officer who had not taken part in the attack—Abrosimov had kept Farber with him.

We buried our dead right over the Volga. Simple coffins of unplanned boards. Heavy leaden clouds moving overhead. Greatcoats flapping in the wind. Unpleasant, wet snow seeping down inside our collars. Patches of ice floating down the river.

Three dark holes.

How simple it all was here at the front. Yesterday here, today—gone. And tomorrow, maybe, you'll be gone. And the earth will fill with the same heavy thuds on the lid of your coffin. Or perhaps there will be no coffin, the snow will cover you as you lie there, face buried in the ground, lie there until the war ends. . . .

Three small, reddish mounds over the Volga. Three grey caps. Three pegs. A salute—the dry, fine rattle of tommy guns. Like an echo, a long-range gun booms from over the Volga. A moment's silence. The sappers take up their spades, smooth over the graves. And that's all. We go.

Not one of them had been over twenty-four. Except Karnaukhov who had been twenty-five.

So he would never read me his verses. I had them now in my pocket—together with my mother's letter and Lucy's photo. Simple, clear, clean—like himself.

The last time I had spoken to Karnaukhov had been three minutes before the attack. He had been squatting in a corner of the trench fitting a capsule onto a grenade. I had asked him something—I no longer remembered what. He had raised his head, and for the first time his eyes had not held that smile—that quiet smile somewhere in the depths of his eyes—that I had always liked. He said something in reply, and I went. I never saw him again.

I lay for a long time, my face buried in my pillow.

In the evening the major stopped me in the officers' mess.

"Get ready for tomorrow, Engineer. . . ."

I did not understand.

"For what?"

The major puffed his pipe without listening. He was pale and haggard.

"For what?" I repeated.

He slowly raised his head.

"You will tell everything . . . how it all happened . . . there on the knoll," and went leaning heavily on his stick—he still limped.

I asked no more questions. Everything was clear.

Ladyghin, staff clerk and the biggest gossip

in the regiment, said that the major and Abrosimov had been summoned to divisional H.Q. and had been there for three hours. Then Abrosimov had shut himself up in his pillbox and not appeared again. He had sent his dinner back.

"His batman was messing about at the sappers' dump. Then he went back to the pillbox at the double, holding his pockets to. They'd got a consignment of vodka just this morning."

He winked a sly green eye.

23

I came late to the trial, and the major was already speaking. The Second Battalion's pipe—the most roomy premises on our sector—was so smoke-filled that you could hardly see your hand in front of your face. Abrosimov was sitting by the wall, lips parched, white, set, eyes fixed on the wall. Astafyev, the secretary, rustled papers, rearranged them, tried the ink on one corner. Beside him sat two more—the reconnaissance chief and the commander of an anti-tank company. Summary Court martial. The major stood, supporting himself with his hands on the table. He had aged ten years in the past twenty-four hours. Every now and then he raised a glass of tea to his lips and drank in tiny, nervous sips. He spoke quietly—so quietly as to be inaudible at the end of the pipe. I pushed my way to the front.

"At the front, trust and confidence are essential," he was saying. "Courage alone is not enough. And ability is not enough. There must be trust too. Trust in the men you're fighting beside. Without that, it's impossible. . . ."

He opened his collar—it was hot in the pipe. It seemed to me that his fingers trembled slightly as they undid the hook.

"I've travelled a long road with Abrosimov . . . a long road of battle . . . Orel, Kastornaya, Voronezh . . . and all the time we've been here. . . And I believed in him. I knew that he was young, inexperienced, perhaps only learning his job here at the front, I knew that he could make mistakes—who doesn't?—but I trusted him. It's impossible not to trust your chief of staff."

Turning his head, he looked at Abrosimov—a long, sad look.

"I know that the blame is mine. It's I that answer for the men, and not the chief of staff. And it's I that am responsible for that operation. And when the Divisional Commander shouted at Abrosimov this morning, I knew that he was shouting at me. And he was right—" the major passed his hand over his hair, and his tired gaze travelled over us all. "War demands sacrifices. That's what war is. But what happened in the Second Battalion yesterday—that's not war. That's annihilation. . . . Abrosimov overrated his authority. He changed my orders. And changed them twice. In the morning by telephone, and then in person, when he drove the men into the attack. . . ."

"The orders were to attack the cisterns. . . . Abrosimov interrupted in a dry, wooden voice, without shifting his eyes from the wall. "And they were not attacking. . . ."

"That's a lie!" and the major banged his fist on the table so that the spoon tinkled in the glass. But in the same instant he controlled himself. He gulped down some tea. "They were attacking. But not in the way you wanted. They were attacking, using their heads, with forethought. And what did you do? You had seen what happened in the first attack? That time, it could not be any other way. We had counted on the barrage. We had to strike an immediate blow, without giving the enemy time to come to. And it was not successful. . . The enemy was stronger and cleverer than we had estimated. We were not able to silence his firing points. I sent the engineer to the second battalion. Shiryayev was there—a man with a head on him. During the night he had made all preparations to capture the German trenches. And he had prepared it cleverly. And you. . . Abrosimov, what did you do?"

Abrosimov's lips began to twitch.

Borodin's usually kindly, gentle face was crimson, his cheeks were trembling.

"I know how you shouted over there. . . How you waved your revolver."

He took another gulp of tea from the glass.

"At the front, an order is sacred. Failure to carry out an order is a crime. And it is always the last order that must be obeyed. And the men obeyed it, and now they are lying dead in front of our trenches. And Abrosimov is sitting here. He deceived his regimental commander. He defied the authorities. The men were killed. . . That's all. And in my opinion it's enough."

The major sank heavily onto a stool.

Abrosimov was still sitting the same way—hands on his knees, eyes fixed on the wall. Astafyev, head bent, was writing swiftly, assiduously.

Several more people spoke, then it was my turn. After me—Abrosimov. He was brief. He considered that the cisterns could be taken only by a mass attack. That was all. And he had demanded that the attack be made. The battalion commanders try to spare their men, that's why they don't like attacking. The cistern could only be taken by attack. And he was not to blame that men had not put their hearts into the attack, had played the coward. . . .

"Played the coward?" came from somewhere at the back of the pipe.

Everybody turned round. Awkward, a head taller than everyone else around him, in his short, ridiculous greatcoat. Farber was pushing his way through to the table.

"Played the coward, you say? Shiryayev a coward? Karnaukhov a coward? You talking of them like that?"

Farber choked, blinking as he screwed up his short-sighted eyes—he had broken his glasses the previous day.

"I saw it all. . . Saw it with my own eyes. . . How Shiryayev went. . . and Karnaukhov and. . . how they all went. . . I'm not good at talking. . . I haven't known them long. . . Karnaukhov and the others. . . How could you put your tongue to say such words. . . Bravery doesn't mean ramming your head against a machine gun. . . Abrosimov. . . Captain Abrosimov said that orders were to attack the cisterns. . . Not to

attack, but to capture. . . The trenches Shiryayev had thought out, that wasn't cowardice. It was tactics. Correct tactics. He was sparing his men. . . Sparing them so that they could go on fighting. Now they're lost. . . And I consider. . ." his voice broke, he sought the glass, did not find it waved his hand. "I consider. . . such people can't. . . they can't hold command. . ."

Farber found no more words, broke off reddened, again sought the glass and suddenly flared up.

"You yourself are the coward. . . You didn't go into the attack. . . And kept me by you. . . I saw it all. . ." Then hunching his shoulders, the hooks of his greatcoat catching on those about him, he pushed his way back.

I followed him out. He was standing leaning against the pipe.

"You spoke well, Farber."

He started.

"What was there good about it. . . Everything was mixed up in my head. When I look at him, you know. . . And he sits there calmly denying everything. And he wasn't drunk then. When a man's drunk it's all the same to him. . . But he. . . no. . . all that's no good. . ."

He was breathing heavily.

"Killed the last of my old-timers. Yermak and Pereversev. Remember them? One was a sailor, the other a combine operator, I think. Inseparable pals. Slept, ate and drank together. You remember them. One of them was a good conjurer."

"And that young platoon commander, I've forgotten his name—with grey strands of hair—was he one of yours?"

"Kalabin? Commander of a machine-gun company. Just a boy. Hadn't been with us a week. Came from hospital, kept on telling us how they'd been fed semolina there. . ."

"No new officers come yet?"

"Sent company commanders from the first and third battalions. The platoons are commanded by sergeants for the present. No senior adjutant so far."

"Hard to get along without an adjutant," I agreed.

For some reason I now felt quite easy in my mind about Farber. There was a new, firmer note in his way of speaking, in everything about him, that had not been there previously.

"And about Shiryayev? You haven't found out anything definite?"

"It doesn't seem to be very serious. His skull's whole, but as for the arm, I don't know. There wasn't much blood, but it hung like a rag."

"The right?"

"No, the left."

"Well, that's a good thing. . ."

"He didn't want to go. He swore and said he'd come back anyway. Whether you want it or not, I'll come, he said. And I'll find Abrosimov, if I have to go to the end of the world after him."

"I don't envy Abrosimov—Shiryayev's got a heavy fist. . ."

We talked for some time more, then Farber returned into the pipe. I went home. I did not want to hear any more of the trial.

Valega was frying bread. The samovar was humming in the corner.

I threw off my boots and tunic, and flung myself onto the pallet.

"Will you have tea or coffee?" Valega asked.

"What's with the coffee?"

"American milk."

"Coffee, then."

Valega went out to pound the coffee. The fat sputtered in the frying pan. I took out Karnaukhov's verses and read them through again.

Then Lisagor came from the Court Martial. He slammed the door. He looked into the frying pan. Then he came over to me.

"Well?" I asked.

"Reduced to the ranks and sent to a punishment company. . . ."

"Got off too easy."

"That's all right. Let him crawl on his belly a bit. Do him good."

We said no more about Abrosimov. The next day he left, taking leave of nobody, his knapsack on his back.

I saw and heard no more of him.

24

That night tanks arrived—six old Thirty-fours, all patched up. For a long time they were sputtering and puffing, their treads grinding by the bank, getting camouflaged. Everybody's spirits rose immediately.

We had been awaiting them for a long time. For ten days rumour had been rife—we were going to get a whole tank division from the rear, straight from the factory. Then the number went down to half, to a battalion. What actually came was six old creatures, weary of life, and not from the rear, but from the Red October, where they had been fighting almost from the first day of the defence. But none of that mattered. Tanks, all the same, armour. . . . And they looked powerful enough.

In the morning they were to be at the forward positions. The major gave orders to search out and prepare a path for them. It would be necessary to blow up two iron platform trucks blocking the way at the crossing.

Three tankmen came to warm themselves in my dugout—two lieutenants and a sergeant, black and dirty, covered with oil from head to foot.

"Got anything to eat?" asked the oldest of them. He had a mottled scar on his face—probably a burn. "Hadh't a bite since morning."

With a sour look, Valega brought out the remnants of my birthday hare. The lieutenants hungrily stuffed both cheeks.

"Well, how's things? Fighting?" they asked.

"Doing a bit in that line," I answered.

"Not taken the cisterns yet?"

"Not yet. . . . How the devil are we to take them with our bare hands?"

The tankmen turned to one another and laughed.

"Banking on us?"

"On who else then? This is the age of machines after all."

A lieutenant with a thick, unshaven beard almost up to his eyes, burst out laughing.

"If you only knew all the places where these machines have been!"

"They look as though they've done their bit. Been on the southwestern?"

"Better ask where we haven't been!"

"Kharkov way?"

"Yes, been there. Why, were you there?"

"Yes, I was there."

"Nepokrytaya, Ternovaya—you know them?"

"Rather. We attacked from there."

"We too. . . . Lost Kharkov because of you. We've been at the Tractor Works here. . . . Any more hare?"

"No more. Only the skin."

"A pity. We've got some vodka. . . ."

"We'll think up something. . . ."

I sent Valega to Chumak.

"Tell him to come over and bring something to eat with him. How much vodka have you?"

"It'll be enough, don't worry."

Valega left, the sergeant with him.

"You're living in heaven here," said the lieutenant with the scar, his eyes indicating the fat cupids round the mirror. "Like lords. . . ."

"Yes, can't complain of my quarters."

"And got books to read."

"Sometimes. . . ."

He leafed through *Martin Eden*.

"I don't remember when I read last. In Przemyśl, was it? The Saturday before the war. I guess I've forgotten how to read," and he laughed. "I'll have to learn the alphabet again after the war."

Then Chumak arrived, sleepy, scratching himself, with down in his hair.

"Call yourself an engineer. . . . Drinking vodka in the middle of the night. . . . Fine idea to get. Here, catch hold."

He pulled two circular sausages and a loaf from under his sailor blouse.

"Your Valega's gone to my corporal. He'll get a couple of tins of pork."

He looked at the tankmen.

"Those your tin cans down on the bank?"

"Whose d'you think?"

"You ought to be ashamed to climb into them. They'll fall apart before they ever get to the forward positions."

The bearded man was offended.

"That's our business."

"Of course it is, it's not mine. My business is to drink vodka and swear at the tankmen for fighting badly."

"And who might you be?"

"I? Ask the engineer. He'll tell you."

"Must be a scout. See it in your mug."

"What mug?" Chumak clenched his fist.

"Easy, easy, lad. Whose vodka is it that you're going to drink?"

"Whose, then? Yours?"

"Ours."

"That's enough, then, I say no more, and I take it all back about the tanks. Tomorrow you'll take the cisterns. How could you fail with machines like that?"

The tankmen laughed. Chumak stretched, cracked his fingers. The bearded lieutenant looked at his watch.

"Where's that Prikhodko gone?"

"Must be unfastening the buckets. Or gone for a jug. Got any water, Engineer? It's strong—ninety-six degrees."

"Shan't be stuck for water with the Volga right beside us."

"Attacking tomorrow, are you?" asked Chumak.

"Orders are to get to the initial point, and then we'll see."

"Not likely to be tomorrow. We haven't been told anything."

"You'll be told."

"If it's not tomorrow," said Chumak, thoughtfully picking at the table with his knife, "you know what Jerry'll be doing to you all day, point blank?"

"They say there's a slope there, we won't be seen."

"They say, they say. . . And what about the Messerschmidts?"

"Have they got many?"

"Enough to give you hell."

Something fell in the corridor with a crash. Somebody swore. Then the sergeant burst in, loaded with flasks.

"What the devil have you got spades lying all over the place for? Nearly smashed all the flasks."

He put them down on the pallet, and turned, smiling and jolly.

"What'll you give me for my news?"

"What news?"

"Wonderful. Tell me what I'll get and you can have it."

"An extra hundred grams. . ." and Chumak frowned, testing the vodka on his tongue. "It's strong as the devil."

"Not enough."

"Then keep it to yourself. You'll spill it anyway after the first drink. Give me the mugs, Engineer."

I gave them to him—there were only two. We'd have to drink in turn. Chumak poured out the vodka and added some water from the kettle.

"Well, what's your news?" asked the lieutenant with the scar.

"I told you it's wonderful. . . I heard a broadcast just now in the sixteenth lorry. . ."

"Hitler's dead, or what?"

"Cold."

"The war's over?"

"On the contrary, it's only just starting. . ." and after a pause. "We've taken Kalach! And then—what's its name—Krovaya. . . Krivaya. . ."

"Krivaya Muzga?"

"Muzga. . . that's it. And something else with a G."

"Not Abganerovo?"

"Yes, that's it—Abganerovo. . ."

"You're not pulling our legs?"

"Why should I? Thirteen thousand prisoners. . . Fourteen thousand killed!"

"Great stuff!"

"When was that?"

"These past three days. . . Kalach, Abganerovo and some more. . . A whole string of names."

"Well, that's that. Jerry's kaput."

Chumak hit me such a blow between the shoulders that I nearly swallowed my tongue.

"For Jerry kaput, fellows!"

We all drank at once—from the mugs, the bottles, drinking water straight from the spout of the kettle.

"So that's what you're up to! Swilling. . ."

Lisagor was standing in the doorway, his mouth open in surprise.

"I'm out there blowing up trucks, and here they are drinking vodka. . ."

I held out a mug to him, and he drained it in gulps. Shut his eyes, gasped, and felt for a crust of bread. Smelt it.

"Drinking and we attack at five. . . You know? They've taken breakfast to the bat talions already."

"The devil. . ."

"Look out and see what's going on along the bank."

The tankmen jumped up, still chewing sausage.

"Shiryayev's swearing about the gaps through going slowly."

"What Shiryayev?"

"What d'you mean, what Shiryayev? The chief of staff. The senior lieutenant."

"Jumping Jesus! Where's he sprung from?"

"You'll be late for the war this way. . ." laughed Lisagor. "Ran off from the base hospital. Raising hell on the bank."

I pulled on my boots. Looked for my revolver. Looked at my watch. A quarter to three.

"Cleared the gaps?"

"Cleared them."

"Full width?"

"Sure. They'll run through sweet as butter."

The tankmen were fussing about, starting up their engines. The whole bank was white. Been snowing again. Shiryayev's voice was sounding from somewhere on the left—bawling someone out.

"See you're back in five minutes to report. . . That clear? Get going then. . ."

Chumak ran past, fastening his sailor blouse as he went.

"New chief of staff's giving 'em hell. Look out, Engineer. . ."

Shiryayev was standing at the entrance to H.Q. dugout, his arm bandaged and in a sling. Bandages gleamed white under his cap. When he saw me, he waved a hand in greeting.

"Off to the forward positions at the double Yurka! Help the tankmen. . . Nobody know where your gaps are there. . ."

"How's your arm?" I asked.

"All right, later on. . . Get moving. Two hours left."

"Very good, Comrade Senior Lieutenant. Have I permission to go?"

"Get on, you, old devil. . ."

I saluted, made a smart left turn clicking my heels, taking my hand from my cap with the first step.

"Halt! Two hours sentry. . ."

A cold, hard snowball caught me right in the nape, broke and went down behind my collar.

I jumped onto the first tank. Valega was there already, fastening a flask to his belt.

One after the other, the tanks moved along the bank, skirted the crossing barrier and the wrecked platform trucks. Came out on the duckboards. The Germans would open fire in a minute—the tanks were running thunderously.

Snowflakes were descending, circling slowly in the air.

The huge white pile of Mamayev Kurgan listened ahead of us.
Forty minutes left before the attack.

25

The attack was fixed for five. At twenty to, a panting Garkusha ran up.

"Comrade Lieutenant. . . ."

"Well, what's the matter?"

He breathed heavily, wiping his wet forehead with his palm.

"The scouts have returned. . . ."

"Well?"

"Found mines. . . ."

"What mines?"

"German ones. Just opposite our gap. Fifty metres away. Some new sort of mines. . . ."

"The devil. . . Where were their eyes yesterday?"

"They say they weren't there yesterday."

"Weren't there. . . Where's that Bukhvostov?"

"In Peteyerov's dugout."

"Shiryayev! Ring up headquarters to hold up the signal. I'll. . . ."

Bukhvostov, a very pockmarked, fragile-looking sergeant of the scouts from the sapper battalion, spread out his hands.

"Jerry placed them last night. I swear he did. . . Yesterday I felt everywhere with my own hands, and there was nothing. . . I swear there wasn't. . . ."

"You swear, you swear. . . Why didn't you report sooner? Always at the last minute. Many of 'em?"

"There'll be ten. And some new sort. I've never seen them before. Like our POMZ, but not quite—the cap somewhere at the side. . . ."

"Garkusha, get camouflage overalls. . . And you lead the way."

Luckily for us there was no moon. We crawled across the tank gap marked with pegs—the pockmarked sergeant, Garkusha and myself. Garkusha's iron-tipped heels flickered before my eyes. We crawled beyond the limits of our own mine field. Whiteness all round, with the dark line of German trenches ahead. The sergeant halted, and silently pointed to something black on the snow. . . POMZ's—just ordinary POMZ's—a cut-off container, detonator and cord. And an extra peg at the side to keep it firmly in the ground. . . And he'd thought that was the detonator. The dope calls himself a scout. . . .

Garkusha skillfully took the sting out of them, one after the other, lying on his side. My hands were cold, I could only manage two. The sergeant sniffed.

"Sh-sh-sh-sh. . . A rocket. . . ."

We froze to the spot. My mouth went dry, and my heart began beating madly. They'd see us, the swine. . . .

Sh-sh-sh-sh. . . A second. . . Out of the corner of my eye I could see that the sergeant had crawled ten metres from me. What a man. . . The Germans would see him at once.

A short machine-gun burst. . . .

Spotted us.

Another burst. . . .

Something struck my left arm with terrific force, then my leg. I buried my head in the snow. It was cold, pleasant, it filled my mouth, nose, ears. Crunched in my teeth. . . Like

ice-cream. And he'd said they weren't POMZ's. . . . Only a peg at the side. . . An ass, that sergeant. All. . . Nothing more. . . Only snow in my teeth. . . .

26

"Well, and how are you going on, Yurka? Not a word for two months since the note from the Medical Battalion. Dirty trick. If it was your right arm that's wounded, you'd have some excuse, but it's your left. It won't do, it sure won't. People come asking me about you every day, and I tell them—he's getting fat in hospital and flirting with the nurses, he's forgotten all about his pals here. But they don't forget you, though you don't deserve it. Chumak's saving some captured cognac specially for you—Six Stars!—and won't let anybody even get a whiff of it. I tried plenty of times, but nothing doing. . . .

"In general, I'm browned off. Sick of sitting still. Damned sick of it. Others are attacking, advancing west, and we're still in the same trenches, the same dugouts. Of course, it's right that Jerry's not what he was. But last month it was a bit grim, all the same. After they got you, we attacked with tanks again, but we didn't get the cisterns, and then the tanks were sent to another sector. Jerry hit one of them, and we fought for it a good month. Divisional H.Q. ordered us to put a firing point under it, and evidently Jerry's divisional H.Q. had thought of the same thing—so we fought for that tank like some sort of saga. Couldn't get it from the front—only six or seven fighting men in the battalion. Had to dig in. And the ground like iron and no explosives—for two weeks the Volga wouldn't freeze. 'Corn-hoppers' dropped us rucks and concentrates.

"We got it in the end, all the same. Dug a tunnel twenty-two metres long, put a hundred kilograms of T. N. T. in it and up it went! Attacked across the hole. That's the sort we are! I've recommended Tugiev, Agnivitsev (he's in the field hospital now) and your Vallega for the Red Star—fine boys they are—and the rest for the 'Valour' medal. Now Farber's machine gun's under the tank giving Jerry hell. They've still got the cisterns. Gone to earth like moles, can't get near them from any side. . . We're fighting with artillery mainly. All except the heavies are on the right bank now. There's a divisional battery right beside our dugout, can't get any sleep. Rodimtsev's and the 92nd from our right have been transferred to Tramway Street. The 39th are grand lads—they've cleared the Red October almost completely.

"We're all busy building O. P.'s just now, a new one every day. Done five already, but none of them suit the major—you know him. One was in the factory chimney—beside the chemical works where there's plenty of blue. Another's on the roof, like a doveot. Visibility fine, but the major said it was cold, draughty, and ordered me to make one in the settlement, by the hollow where the F. D. locomotive's standing. But the 270's artillery brought their guns there and drew Jerry's fire. The shells were bursting right close by—couldn't have the major there.

"Come along back, and we'll look for a

good place together. And you can help dig it (ha-ha!), because I've got such blisters that I can't hold a spade any more. Shiryayev wants to be remembered to you, his arm's quite all right again.

"Oh, yes. . . The second battalion's got a new assistant doctor, instead of Burlik who's gone to a study course. You'll see when you come. Chumak's hanging about there all the time, and he polishes his buckles every day. Well, come back soon. We're waiting for you. . . .

Your A. Lisagor."

On the other side of the paper was a P. S. in large, crooked letters, the lines running down towards the bottom of the sheet.

"Good morning or afternoon, Comrade Lieutenant. This is to tell you that I hope you are well as this leaves me at present. Comrade Lieutenant your books are all in order. I put them in your suitcase. Comrade Platoon Commander has got two accumulators and we have electric light in the dugout now. Senior Lieutenant Shiryayev wants to take it for H.Q. Comrade Lieutenant come back soon. We all send our greetings and me too.

Your batman A. Bolegov."

I thrust the letter into my satchel, put on my dressing gown and went to look for the Head Surgeon—a good fellow, he could always see your point. . . .

Next morning I was off to Stalingrad in creaking boots, a new private's greatcoat with a packet of letters in my pocket. I said goodbye to the fellows, and they went with me to the gate. "Regards to Paulus!"

"Sure thing!"

"Don't forget what I asked you!"

"I won't."

"It's right close by. The second gulley from yours. Where the disabled Katyusha's standing."

"If you see Marusya, tell her I've something interesting to say to her when I see her, I can't write it."

"O.K. . . Goodbye. . . Give *Pathfinder* to ward six. And say goodbye to the PT instructor for me."

"Sure we will. . . ."

"Well, so long."

"Write us. . . Don't forget. . . ."

The driver was beckoning.

"Time to be off, Lieutenant."

I shook hands all round and ran to the lorry.

27

It was evening when we got to Burkovsky village, divisional rear offices and Paymaster Lazar. I spent the night with him in a small hut crowded with old women, children and some clerks.

"Well, how's it back there in the rear?" they all asked,

"Just as usual."

"Were you in Leninsk?"

"Yes. Not a very grand hospital. Can't compare it with my dugout on the bank." Lazar laughed.

"You won't know your dugout now—electric light, a gramophone and fifty records, walls hung with Jerry's blankets—an ideal home exhibition."

"Long ago you were there?"

"Got back last night. Handing out pay."

"Are the Jerries still there?"

"Jerries? There? They've shown a clean pair of heels from Mamayev—dug in beyond the Long Gulley. Got one foot in the grave and the other slipping. Nothing to eat, no ammunition, gnawed bones lying about in their dugouts. Fizzled out. . . ."

That night I tossed from side to side for a long time before I could get to sleep.

Early in the morning I went on in an O. P. car.

We came up to the Volga without any camouflage, straight to the bank. The broad river stretched before us, a pure blinding white. Something stood out black on the other side—must be Regimental H. Q. dugouts. A red flag on the white background. . . The devil, how time flew. . . Not so long ago, it seemed only yesterday, that same Volga, so dazzling now had been red and black with smoke and conflagrations, boiling with explosions, pitted with floating boards and refuse of all kinds. But now! The ice road with its boundary posts went arrowstraight to the opposite bank. Machines were moving to and fro—lorries, jeeps, and light cars with their colourful camouflage. There were occasional patches left by mortar shell explosions—scattered, hundreds of yards between them—old ones. A red-whiskered traffic control with a yellow flag said that there had been no firing on the crossing for two weeks. Jerry was played out.

We drove past the H.Q. dugouts.

"Your papers."

"Can't pass without them?"

"Impossible, Comrade Lieutenant. . . Got to have order."

Miracles. . . A wire fence round Chumak's dugout, a sentry at the door, the path sand-ed, and a number on every dugout—painted neatly in black on a white board.

A signpost on a striped stake: "Borodin's H.Q. 300 metres," and underneath, in red pencil: "First turning to the left." So he'd moved. The first to the left should be the gulley, where divisional H.Q. had been.

I was excited—really excited, as one always is on returning home. You come back from holiday or some other journey, and the nearer home you are, the faster you walk. And you notice everything as you go, every trifle, everything new. The pavement's been covered with asphalt, there's a new cigarette stand at the corner, the tram stop's been moved closer to the chemist's, a new story's been built on No. 26. You see everything, notice everything.

This was where we had landed on that memorable September day. That was the path where they were dragging the gun. There's the white water tower. A bomb fell there and killed thirty wounded men. It's been patched up, mended, and there's some sort of a smithy there now. And here was the slit trench—Valega and I took shelter from bombs there once. Must have filled it in, not a trace of it now. And here somebody's built steps—don't have to clamber up the slope now. Real posh—even a handrail. The gulley is empty. A heap of German mines lying on the snow. A coil of wire. Our lathe—I recognize it—Garkusha's work. About twenty Jerries by the

lavatory—dirty, unshaven, wrapped in some sort of rags. They rise as they see me.

A voice from somewhere above.

"Who are you looking for, Comrade Lieutenant?"

Something like a whirlwind in a cloud of snow hurling itself at me, nearly carrying me off my feet.

"You're alive, you're well, Comrade Lieutenant?"

A merry, ruddy face. Laughing, childlike eyes.

Sedykh! I nearly dropped. . . Sedykh! . . .

"Where've you sprung from? . . . The devil. . . ."

He says nothing, but just beams. Beams from head to foot. And I with him. We stand there shaking hands endlessly, and I feel a bit giddy.

"Everything's changed here, Comrade Lieutenant. . . We're chasing the Germans till the dust flies. . . Our headquarters is in the gulley. Everybody's at the forward positions. But I got a scratch and they left me here to look after the Jerries. . . ."

"And Igor?"

"Alive and well."

"Thank the Lord."

"Come over and drink some vodka. There's a whole barrel of it. Eh, won't they be glad. . . And you're from hospital? Yes? The lads told me. . . ."

"From hospital, from hospital. But stop jiggling about, let me get a look at you."

I swear, he hadn't changed a bit. No, that's not right—he'd become more manly. Cheeks slightly sunken. But just as rosy, as strong as he ever was, and with the same eyes—gay, mischievous, with long curling lashes like a girl's.

"Here, stop a bit—what's that shining on your jacket?"

Sedykh looked embarrassed and began scratching a callous on his hand—his old habit.

"Well, that's a dirty trick. . . and you said nothing. . . Give me your hand. . . What did you get it for?"

He blushed still more. My fingers were crushed in his huge palm.

"You won't be ashamed to go back to the collective farm now?"

"Why, what should I be 'shamed for. . . " scratching and scratching his callous. "And have you still got that thing, that cigarette case of mine? . . ."

"Why, of course, of course. Here it is, have a smoke."

We both took one.

"Got a light?"

"Hans, a light for the Lieutenant! Quick! Feuer, Feuer. . . or whatever you call it. . . ."

A frail-looking German in horn-rimmed glasses, probably he had been an officer, jumped up quickly and snapped his revolver-shaped lighter.

"Bitte, Kamerad."

Sedykh took the lighter from him.

"That'll do, we'll manage ourselves," and held it to my cigarette. "Eh, they're like an old clo' shop. Got all their pockets full o' truck. They surrender, and quick out with a lighter. I've got twenty of 'em. . . shall I give you a couple?"

"That's all right, time enough. Better tell me about everything. . . After all, four months is good while."

"Eh, what's there to tell, Comrade Lieutenant. It's all the same old story. . . " but all the same he began telling me—the usual story of the man in the trenches familiar to all of us, but always heard with interest. . . The time when they'd been laying mines and almost all got wiped out, the time when they'd lain a whole day in the gulley—a sniper had them taped, shot through his cap in three places, and then they'd been surrounded for two weeks in the foundry, with the Germans bombing them and nothing to eat, and worst of all, nothing to drink, and he'd gone four times to the Volga for water, and then. . . then they'd laid mines again, demined, laid barbed wire.

"But you know the sort o' thing yourself. . . " and his clear blue eyes smiled.

"Haven't been dozing. I knew you wouldn't. Let's have another cigarette and then I'll go to look for my lot. Where are they, do you know?"

"Right over there, in the forward positions. Beyond Long Gulley, they ought to be. I was left here alone—I limp."

28

By evening I was quite drunk. Drunk with the air, the sun, with walking, meetings, impressions and gladness. And with cognac. Fine cognac. The same Six Star that Chumak had been saving. . . .

Chumak poured out glass after glass.

"Bottoms up, Engineer! Got out of the way of it these two months. Been filling yourself with semolina and beef tea. Get it down, don't be afraid of it. You've earned it!"

We were lying in some ruined house—I don't remember how we got there—Chumak, myself, Lisagor, and of course Valega. We were lying on some straw. Valega smoking his pipe in the corner, frowning and angry. He thoroughly disapproved of my conduct. What could I have been thinking of—to leave an officer's greatcoat, well-fitting, with brass buttons at the hospital, and take instead an ordinary private's coat that only reached to my knees. . . What way was that to go about? And rough top boots with wide shafts and rubber soles. . . .

"I've got you some better ones," he said gloomily when he met me, mustering me from head to foot with clear disapproval. "They're in the dugout. . . Only they've got a low instep."

I made my excuses as best I could, but evidently I was not yet forgiven.

"Bottoms up, bottoms up, Engineer," Chumak kept pouring out glass after glass.

Through the gaps in the shattered wall I could see Mamayev Kurgan, and that chimney of the Red October—the single one that had never fallen. The sky was streaked and spangled with rockets—red, blue, yellow, green—shifting sea of rockets. . . And firing. There had been firing all day—revolvers, rifles, everything there was. . . Bang, bang, bang. . .

What a day, God, what a day! Stretched out on the straw, I looked up at the sky and had no more strength to think of anything. Too

filled with impressions. I counted the rockets. That I could still do. Red, green, again green, four green ones one after the other. . . .

Chumak said something, I did not listen.

"Leave me alone. . . ."

"Why, it won't hurt you. . . . They're asking you. Don't be a pig."

"Let me alone, I tell you, what are you nagging for."

"Well, read it. . . . It won't hurt you. Just ten lines. . . ."

"What ten lines?"

"Here. His speech. It's interesting. . . . Damned interesting."

He thrust a fragment of some German newspaper right under my nose.

"What rubbish is this?"

"Read it."

The letters were dancing before my eyes—unaccustomed Gothic characters. Hitler's degenerate face—lips compressed, heavy features, a huge, idiotic-looking peak.

Völkischer Beobachter. . . .

The Führer's Munich speech on November 9th, 1942.

Nearly three months ago. . . .

"Stalingrad is ours! In a few houses Russians are still sitting. Well, let them sit there. That's their own affair. But our task is done. The town bearing the name of Stalin is in our hands. The greatest Russian artery—the Volga—is paralyzed. And there is no power in the world which can move us from that spot."

"It is I that tell you this—a man who has never once deceived you, a man on whom Providence has placed the burden and the responsibility for this war, the greatest in the history of mankind. I know that you believe me, and you can rest assured—I repeat it with all responsibility before God and history—Stalingrad we shall never leave. Never. No matter however much the Bolsheviks want it. . . ."

Chumak was shaking with laughter.

"Yes, indeed, Adolf? Eh, you're grand. God, you're grand. Just the way you said! Valega, let's have another glass on the strength of that."

Valega poured out, and Chumak rolled over onto his stomach supporting his head on his hands.

"But why, Engineer, why? Explain me that."

"Why what?"

"Why did it all turn out this way? Eh? Remember how they battered us in September? But all the same they didn't manage it? Why? Why didn't they throw us into the Volga?"

My head was spinning—I was still weak after the hospital. I rose, swaying and went to the gap where once there had probably been a door.

What a lofty, transparent sky, clear, pure, not a cloud, not an aeroplane. Only the rockets. And pale, embarrassed stars among them. And the Volga—broad, calm, smooth, unfrozen just in one place—opposite the water tower. People said that it never freezes there.

The greatest Russian artery. . . . Paralyzed, he'd said. . . . Eh, the fool! The fool! "In a few houses the Russians are still sitting. Let them sit there. That's their own affair. . . ."

Here they were, those few houses. Here it was—Mamayev—solid, unlovely. . . . And like pimples—two pimples on the top—the cisterns. . . . Eh, what a time they'd given us. Even now I hated to look at them. . . . And beyond those shattered red walls, riddled like a sieve, Rodimtsev's positions had begun—a strip two hundred metres in depth. . . . Just to think of it, two hundred metres, a miserable two hundred metres. . . . To drive through the whole of Belorussia, the Ukraine, the Donbas, the Kalmyk plains, and not be able to pass those two hundred metres. . . . Ho-ho!

And Chumak asked why. Not just anybody, but Chumak, of all people. That was what tickled me. Perhaps Shirayev, or Farber would come asking why? Or that old chap—that machine gunner who had lain for three days with his machine gun, cut off, firing as long as his ammunition lasted, and then crawled to the bank with his weapon. And even brought the empty cartridge boxes with him. "Why throw them away—they may come in useful." I did not even remember his name, only his face—bearded, with eyes narrowed to a slit and his cap on sideways. Perhaps he too would start asking me, why? Or that Siberian who had always been silently chewing. If he had still been alive he would probably ask why. I had heard how he had died. I only knew him for two days—he had been sent not long before I was wounded. Gay, quick-witted, facetious. He had taken two anti-tank grenades, run right up to a disabled tank and thrown both of them into the slit. . . .

Eh, Chumak, Chumak. . . . You sailor. . . . What silly questions you ask. . . . You come up to me with a bottle in your hand, and you don't understand a thing, not a thing. . . . Come here. . . . Come on, come on. . . . Come and embrace me—we're both a bit tipsy and tipsy men always embrace. That's not sentimentality, heaven forbid. . . . And Valega, let him come too. . . . Drink, soldier. . . . Drink to victory. See what Jerry's done to the town? . . . Bricks, nothing else. . . . But we're still alive. And as for the town. . . . We'll build another. Right, Valega? And Jerry's done. Look at them going along there, humping their rucksacks and blankets. . . . Remembering Berlin, their Fraus. . . . You want to see Berlin, Valega? I do. I want to badly. . . . When we get there we'll see it. . . . We'll be there sure enough. . . . I'll just run in to Kiev for a minute on the way, see my old folks. They're wonderful, my old folks, honest they are. . . . Let's drink to them—got any more, Chumak?

And we drank. To my old folks, to Kiev, to Berlin and some more, I don't remember what. And around us the firing kept on and on, and the sky was purple, and rockets hissed and somewhere near, somebody was playing *Young Lady* on a balalaika.

"Comrade Lieutenant. Permit me to speak to you."

"What's the matter now?"

"The chief of staff wants you."

"And who are you?"

"Staff runner."

"Well?"

“Orders are for all to come at 18 hours. To the H.Q. in the gulley. . . .”

“He’s crazy. Today’s free day, a holiday.”

“I know nothing about that, Comrade Lieutenant. The chief of staff gave the order and I’ve transmitted it.”

“But tell me what it’s all about. . . All you say is ‘order, transmitted.’ Is it a banquet, or what? In honour of victory?”

The runner laughed.

“I heard that the northern grouping’s to be finished off tomorrow. At the Barricade Works. Ours and the 39th are to go there. . . .”

“So that was it!”

Chumak was searching in the darkness for his sailor blouse and belt, fumbling about on the ground. Lisagor was brushing the straw from his greatcoat.

“Valega, get everything together and cut off for Garkusha. In the second yard from here, in the cellar. Get cracking.”

Valega dashed off.

“See you don’t forget the spades. . . .” shouted Lisagor and turning to me. “Well, Engineer, let’s get off to dig H.Q. At the double. Get ourselves blisters. . . .”

“Got enough spades?”

“They’ll do. One each. You, me, Garkusha,

Valega. We’ll get it done during the night, sure thing. And maybe we’ll be able to get near a window somewhere in a house. . . Come on.”

Chumak’s ringing voice sounded from outside.

“In columns of four—fall in! With a song—quick—march!”

And he had only three men to a platoon. . .

Lisagor clapped me on the back.

“So we didn’t manage to get to your Igor. It’s always the way. . . Have to leave it till tomorrow. . . Let’s hope to God we’re still alive.”

Somewhere high up a “corn-hopper” roars. . . night patrol. Flares soar up over the Barricade Works. Our flares, not German ones. No more Germans left to send them up. Yes, and why should they. . . .

In a long green column they are trailing down to the Volga. In silence. Behind them a sergeant—young, snub-nosed, a long curved pipe in his mouth.

He winks at us in passing.

“Guiding the excursion. . . Want to see the Volga. . . .”

He laughs gaily, infectiously. . . .

Translated by Eve Manning

BOOKS AND WRITERS

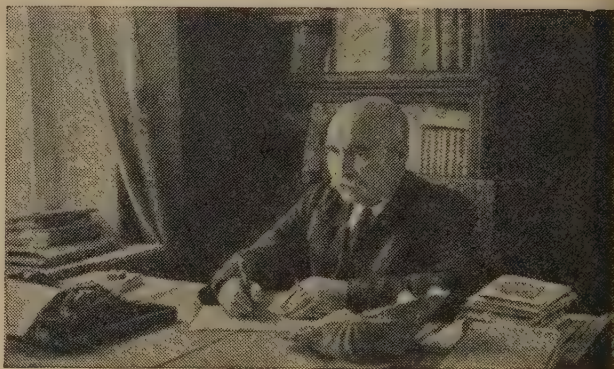
ALEXEI NOVIKOV-PRIBOI

A volume of selected works by Alexei Novikov-Priboi, a prominent Soviet writer, who died some years ago, has just been issued by the *State Literary Publishing House*, Moscow.

Alexei Silych Novikov-Priboi was born in the village of Matveevskaya, in the Tambov gubernia in 1877. His father was a peasant—"broad-boned, strong, born of the soil"—who after 25 years of service in the army returned to his native village, bringing with him a Polish wife. The writer's mother was younger and weaker than his father; "the unaccustomed farm labour aged her before her time. She was a dreamer and lived much in the land of fancy." (From Novikov-Priboi's autobiography.)

The road to education was barred to the common people in tsarist Russia. The future author received his first lessons in reading and writing from his father, later from the local deacon and then in the parish school. But his education proper only began in Kronstadt, in the Baltic fleet, although not without difficulties. Not all the officers kept away from the sailors—"there was much to be learned from many of them." Still more important were the "special courses for paymaster's stewards, the construction and machinery of the ship, the voyages over the high seas, the ways the different ports were built, the Sunday school, the friendship with better educated comrades, the acquaintance with students, the reading of illegal literature... all this enriched the mind and brought a new outlook on life."

Novikov was arrested and served a sentence in prison for distributing revolutionary, political publications. During the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) he was appointed paymaster's steward aboard the armoured cruiser "Orel" with the second Pacific squadron. He made the difficult voyage from the Baltic to the Far East, the voyage which ended in the tragic battle of Tsushima (May 27, 1905) in which Admiral Rozhdestvensky's squadron was defeated. Novikov was a war prisoner with the Japanese for some time. He returned home in time to take part in the first Russian revolution in 1905. Two stories about the battle of Tsushima, which he published, were confiscated by the tsarist administration. Between 1907 and 1913 he was a political exile in foreign lands, sailed before the mast on merchant vessels, visited England, France, Spain, Africa, Italy; he lived for some time on Capri as Gorky's guest, the latter helping him in his work on a book of



Sea Stories. The book was banned by the censor and only appeared in 1917. In fact Novikov-Priboi's literary career only developed after the October Revolution.

Since then his works have been published in many editions. He is a writer with a wide range of interests; his stories tell us of Russian village life and of the partisan movement in Siberia; his favourite subject, however, is the sea—sailors, foreign and Russian, the old Russian navy and the new Soviet fleet. (*The Call of the Sea*, *Submarine Crew*, *In Otrada Bay*, *The Communist at Sea*, and others.)

The theme of the sea is nearly always combined with that of the cultural and political growth of Novikov's heroes, sons of the people, the widening of their mental outlook. His heroes seek "a way out" of the unjust oppression of class society. They do not find this solution in individualistic romanticism (the extremely vivid and colourful canvas of Novikov's works gives us the right, perhaps, to speak of romanticism but never of individualism) but in comradeship, in mutual struggle. The sea wind brings with it a breath of the liberating hurricane of great historical events. This is the new feature which Novikov-Priboi brought to sea literature.

We could give here the outlines of many short stories by this writer, but his talent found its best expression in two novels worthy of being dealt with in detail here: the heroic epic of *Tsushima* (which owing to its size could not be included in the above-mentioned volume of selected works) and the novel *The Captain*.

Tsushima, one of the most popular books in Soviet literature, has won a Stalin Prize and has been translated into 37 languages. It was Novikov's life work, begun from a diary which he kept during the voyage and from the material which he amassed in conversations with his fellow war prisoners. These

materials were lost (the diaries, for instance, had to be burned to avoid their falling into the hands of the Japanese), but the writer worked tirelessly, reconstructing and enlarging his book almost to the end of his life, adding many new facts and details.

In this novel the experience of the individual and that of the masses are merged into one. "I did not permit a single chapter to go to the press without first reading it to my living heroes," wrote Novikov in his introduction. "And even so the book would not have been written the way it was if I myself had not been at Tsushima and had not seen the horrors of that unprecedented tragedy." Such experience must have been real to be depicted in a style so true to life. So complete a portrait could not have been drawn without the information given to the author by the men who fought in the battle.

This cooperation did not only serve as a technical source of information; it helped to make the book a record of the thoughts and feelings of many people, friends of the author, and not a mere narration of facts. The great chronicle which gives all the details of the voyage from the Baltic through the English Channel, the Bay of Biscay, past Africa, Madagascar and Singapore to Tsushima, and all the moments of the battle which in scale can only be compared with Salamanca and Trafalgar, is not of military-historical value alone. Thousands of living human hearts beat in it. Before us passes a gallery of sailors and commanders, every one of whom is a personality, an individuality.

Both as the author of and as a participant in the epic, Novikov-Priboi does not stand isolated. One of the most terrible chapters in the book is that which describes the hospital on the lower deck of the cruiser, crowded with wounded, groaning men; the cruiser begins to list to starboard . . . maybe a few minutes more and the ship will keel over. "It seemed that an iron wall was descending before us, cutting us off forever from life." Novikov recalls his village and his mother. The iron wall is descending but the human soul struggles; it will not be cut off from life. The memories of all that was dear persist to the end: his home and his parents, his native village and the starling with the red silk thread tied to its leg that will return in the spring, his childhood and the familiar places which he wants to see again—all these accompany Novikov on his road to Calvary. . . .

There is a little episode in the novel, extremely simple and insignificant yet tenderly moving. By some accident, an egg has been placed in the flag locker. The temperature inside the steel hull of the great vessel standing at anchor in the tropics was like that of an incubator: "the embryo within the egg gained life and a chick was born. The chick had dried its feathers and stood uncertainly like a fluffy yellow ball on its almost transparent pink legs. . . . Then began a pilgrimage to the bridge; the whole crew, deck hands, engine-room artificers and stokers all came. The officer of the watch chased them back. Your Excellency, they say a chick has been born without being hatched. Let us have just one look at it, they begged him.

The circle widened out so that all could get a glimpse of the newly-hatched chick running weakly along the wooden deck. This tiny saffron-coloured ball of fluff with his dainty rose-coloured beak, his tiny, black beady eyes that looked at us so naively seemed uncommonly attractive. I did not recognize the crew or myself either for that matter. The gloomy mood had disappeared. . . . The longest face brightened up when the chick came in sight."

They made a cage for the chick.

"He was well fed: he got various boiled cereals, white bread broken up in water and crumbled white of egg. What is more, every man who went ashore made it his business to bring back some insects or larvae for the bird. . . . Sometimes when Volovsky could not see his feathered protégé he would call him: "Sonny, Sonny. . . ." We could not forget him. Perhaps he excited us so much because he was so small and helpless in that huge realm of steel and mighty machines, mines, turrets and broadside guns and thousands of explosive shells."

These reminiscences of men with whom he lived and worked, are dear to Novikov, but do not serve the author as a barrier shutting him off from the remaining world. On the contrary, they pave the way to an understanding of and sympathy with other people, people like himself, the working people of town and country. Each one of these has similar memories of his own, has near and dear ones in some far corner of vast Russia.

This helps the men draw closer to each other. This is the type of friendship and comradeship spoken of by the revolutionary-minded engineer Vassiliev: "I did everything I could to persuade the surgeons to send me back to the cruiser. Like a faithful watchdog my reason warned me that I was taking a false step—it might mean my ruin. My heart, however, drew me back to the cruiser by an unbreakable cord. I was accustomed to my ship, to her crew and to my comrades. I was passionately anxious to risk my life together with my friends."

"What is the nation," demands Novikov in another place, and replies:

"The nation is me and electrician Alferenko, boatswain Voyevodin and stoker Baklanov, the officers and ratings and, the main thing, the workers and peasants scattered over the towns and villages of our empire."

In this way human relations are brought to the fore: from relatives in the village of Matveevskaya, from the comrades on board the cruiser, to the people, the nation as a whole. This nation, these people are the heroes of Novikov-Priboi's book. And hence the values stressed by the book are those inherent in the people.

Paymaster's steward Novikov is not alone in his sufferings and expectations, he suffers and waits together with his people and all his strivings and seekings are profoundly democratic. The desire for knowledge of which he speaks here and in many of his other books, is a feeling utterly different from the tiredness, scepticism, indifference that are characteristic of the writers of the so-called "lost generation" in West-European literature.

"We sail along the coast of the huge is-

land of Sumatra. . . On our port lay its blue mysterious banks, as indistinct as a rising mist. I gazed at them with all the ardour of a curious child: if only I could get to that new world, I thought, wander through primeval forests, visit mysterious lakes and rivers and mingle with the life of four million Malays whom I had never seen."

Novikov tells us about engineer Vassiliev who introduced him to Karl Marx's *Capital*:

"I was not attracted by his officer's rank, medals or riches. I knew that these things do not necessarily go to people who are gifted and honest. But I had a painfully passionate desire to be as clever and well-educated as engineer Vassiliev seemed to me to be; even on board a warship he read Marx and the works of other great thinkers and I wanted to be like him.

"As I listened to him I learned to respect engineers. Together with the workers they remake the surface of the earth, they delve deep down into the earth for coal and oil, for metals and precious stones; they push their tunnels through mountains and throw magnificent bridges across rivers, they join seas together by canals and build factories where there were formerly impenetrable swamps."

All this may seem simple, elementary, well known, but at the same time it is new and up-to-date. Here we have the motive force of every living culture—this faith and will power. And woe to those who waste these fine qualities of youth.

An absolutely disinterested, selfless, honest and straightforward approach to life, comradeship, love of the homeland, respect for labour, the passionate desire for education—these are the values which are brought to us by paymaster's steward Novikov and his friends. And these precious values of the people must be stressed again and again, with that warm and direct understanding of them only to be found in those who are intimately connected with the masses; they must be stressed as they are stressed by Novikov-Priboi. For him these noble qualities are not abstract conceptions but flesh and blood, personal passion and a vital necessity.

The ruling classes of tsarist Russia sought to crush these strivings, to hold back the steady growth of the people's understanding.

An extremely important and critical turning point in this growth is portrayed in *Tsushima*. The war of 1904-1905 showed the rottenness and inability of the tsarist regime.

To quote Lenin it brought out the fact that the autocracy was incompatible with the interests of social development as a whole, with the interests of the people as a whole (with the exception of a handful of officials and magnates). The autocracy, he said, has got the country into a deadlock from which only the people can free themselves and then only by destroying tsarism. The revolutionary movement was spreading through the country. The news of the "bloody Sunday" on January 9th—of the cruel attack of the tsar on the workers' peaceful manifestation—reached the Pacific squadron. "And I am not alone," writes Novikov-Priboi. "Thousands of men in the squadron have been pondering over this event." "Un-

der the influence of recent events the sailors on board the cruiser are more and more losing faith in the autocratic rule of old Russia." The squadron was not isolated from the country, from the revolution which was beginning. The history of the battle of Tsushima belongs to the history of the Revolution. This broad, popular point of view lends unity, integrity and philosophical significance to the wealth of naval, psychological and ordinary observations from every-day life that are collected in the book.

If the hero of the book has been an individual socially isolated, lost in a crowd of strangers, it would have been impossible to draw this grand and detailed portrait of the voyage and the battle, or it would have had to be presented separately from the story of the hero and his fate. (That is how great battles often were presented in former works of fiction.) But here this loneliness does not exist: the heroes of *Tsushima* form a large community; these men are bound to each other by comradeship and a common fate; together they arrive at an understanding of the true meaning of events. And in view of this the naval battle can be portrayed as a whole and not in scattered episodes; it is not a bird's-eye view but it seems as though the author himself had been present everywhere and had himself seen and taken part in all that went on in the different vessels.

This is not only the successful solution of a problem in composition—one of the most difficult that can confront an author. The popular point of view helps the author to see the events he portrays in the correct historical perspective.

As we know, the battle of Tsushima ended in a rout and defeat in which almost the whole of the Russian Pacific squadron was lost. Novikov reproduces this catastrophe with absolute verity, without any attempt to add colour, not omitting any one tragic, terrible, painful feature. But his story is not depressing as one might think. A brave confidence in a brighter future triumphs over the grievous tragedy: "Never mind, pal! Everything will change!"

Novikov and the people, whose strivings and hopes he expressed, clearly understand the reasons for this defeat: that is the unjust, obsolete social relations; the wrong, abnormal conditions under which the fleet was forced to work owing to those relations; the despotic, self-confident stupidity of the tsar's favourite—the half-insane Admiral Rozhdestvensky and his followers.

Throughout the voyage and battle Novikov and his heroes—the mass of the sailors, and the better part of the commanders (the Russian navy of those times had many outstanding commanders but they did not determine the fate of the fleet, the tsarist statesmen gave them no opportunity of showing their talents) systematically comment upon all the clumsy and foolish mistakes made by Rozhdestvensky. The weakness, stupidity and madness of the tsar's agents are compared with the courage, skill and wisdom of the sailors and those officers who are linked up with them. And like a refrain one thought runs through the book: "We would not have done it like that."

Woven into the story are reminiscences of heroic traditions, of the wonderful victories won by the Russian fleet in the past, of the great Russian admirals Senyavin, Ushakov, Nakhimov.

"The fortress of the island of Corfu in the Mediterranean had always been considered impregnable. It could not, however, resist the Russian sailors on February 20, 1799. This was one of the greatest victories won by the Russian Navy, a victory which finally made the name of Ushakov known throughout the world as that of a great admiral."

Under the tragic, grim conditions of the war of 1904-1905, when all that was obsolete and reactionary, that fettered the life of the people made itself felt with such tragic consequences, wonderful heroic deeds were done. The second squadron was able to establish contact with Admiral Nebogatov's detachment only thanks to the feat of one of the defenders of Port Arthur—the sailor Babushkin. The crew of the coastguard cruiser "Admiral Ushakov" went to their death heroically with their commander Miklukha-Maklai: "He gathered his crew around him, he instilled discipline into them, he mobilized them for a stubborn resistance to an enemy who was obviously numerically and qualitatively superior."

In accordance with the age-old honourable traditions, he was the last to leave his ship:

"Two sailors supported the wounded Miklukha who was floating in a lifebelt. . . . A shell splinter had struck him in the shoulder and the commander gradually lost his strength; in a short while the sailors supporting him noticed that his head was hanging helplessly.

"'Leave me,' he muttered weakly, 'save yourselves. I shall die anyway. . . .'

"The commander closed his eyes. Those were his last words. The sailors, however, swam beside their commander for a long time and only left him when they were certain that he was dead."

The armoured cruiser "Alexander III" became the main target of a dozen Japanese warships, and by drawing the enemy fire, saved the other Russian ships at her own cost. . . . Her hull had been riddled, most of her superstructure had been shot away, and she was wreathed in black smoke. . . . What was happening, meanwhile, on the bridges, in the conning tower, in the turrets, and on the decks? Who was really in command? Who manœuvred the ironclad with such dauntlessness and skill during these terrible hours? Is it possible that all the officers had been killed or disabled so that towards the end, the "Alexander III"—and therefore the squadron—was under the command of a senior boatswain, or even a simple helmsman? That will remain an insoluble enigma. In any case, the behaviour of this warship during the most terrible sea fight, known to history, will always evoke widespread admiration.

The destroyer "Gromky" sinks in unequal battle against great odds. "The destroyer heeled over to port and her battered hull rose like a monument over the dead. Another minute passed and the dark water swirled

like a tempestuous whirlpool over the sunken ship. The Japanese had been foiled in their efforts to capture the vessel intact. They will long remember that heroic vessel as a formidable warning for the future. From the example of the 'Grozny,' descendants of those Russian sailors, men who love their country, will learn implacability towards the enemy and will have a profound admiration for the heroes who died undefeated."

The final conclusion, expressed by Engineer Vassiliev, arises inevitably and logically from the course of events and the general reasoning: "Yet Japan has not conquered the working masses of Russia, but the detested and corrupt government of our country."

Today, after our victories in the Great Patriotic War these words ring with the conviction of a prophecy come true.

As the survivors of the battle returning home from prison, sail past the island of Tsushima, the stoker Baklanov exclaims: "Here you saw for yourselves how our comrades died."

He vows to fight for a better life for posterity:

"I'll go on with the job so long as my heart continues to beat."

Novikov-Priboi could not but write this book; and with him we feel the profound craving for expression to which he yielded. All of us have lost near and dear ones; it is not only the great people of the past who are near to us although centuries lie between us; there are others, unknown people, adults and children whom only we remember.

"We all know that at the bottom of the sea in this strait of Tsushima lay the greater part of the second Pacific squadron, that we were steaming over a huge graveyard containing the bones of more than 5,000 seamen."

These dead men had to be spoken of, they had to be spoken for. When we call these nameless heroes to mind, we are happy in the knowledge that we are living in the land of victorious Socialism. This is the better life that has been won and of which no one shall ever deprive us.

Leaving the tragic history of the Tsushima defeat, the theme of the talent and growth of the people recurs in another work, written with great passion and eloquence: *The Captain*.

The action of the first part of the novel is staged in pre-revolutionary Russia; a man in a short homespun coat and a ragged rabbit-skin hat comes to the naval barracks. This man—his name is Zakhar Psaltyrev—is extremely happy that he has been assigned to serve in the fleet. "I'm from a farm and I know nothing," he declares; but he wants to see the ocean, he is interested in artillery, mines, electricity; "I want to learn everything."

He works hard and learns something new already in the barracks and then wherever he serves: aboard an armoured cruiser and on a steam-and-sail cruiser. He makes an attempt to look through the books in the cabin of his commander Count Everling, but this ends badly (. . . "Looking for education? Get out of here!"). He gets hold of a Malinin and Burenin arithmetic book, reads Dostoyevsky; the count's chef, a remarkable,

original type, tells him about astronomy. The cook's daughter with whom he falls in love (she is the daughter of an admiral but the girl does not know her father nor does he know her) teaches him to read and write. He is taught by the gun-captain and the miners, he is taught by the boatswain Kudinov.

This motif of education is one of the most characteristic in Novikov-Priboi's works. It is worth recalling how in his beautiful *Tale of the Boatswain's Mate* the sailor studies the construction of the lightning-conductor, the microscope and Darwin's theory.

Literature knows the character of another sailor just as eager for knowledge as Zakhar Psaltyrev. This is Jack London's hero Martin Eden. We all remember how he works in a laundry and denies himself the least luxury in order to buy textbooks on algebra, physics and chemistry, how he writes stories and articles and sends them to various publishing houses which, however, refuse to print them; how he starves and how he cooks his own sparse meals. He wins our sympathies by his persistence and his eager desire for culture.

But how greatly these two sailors differ from each other in reality!

Martin grows up in loneliness. His past is something dark and evil to him, which he wants to break with. He shuns the society of people of his own class. He wants to rise to that bright kingdom in which the "upper classes" live.

He succeeds in leaving his own class. Fortune smiles on him and when he meets his former companions they seem rude and rough to him, and he looks down on them.

Here we can no longer sympathize with him.

And how does all this end? The rich girl with whom he read Swinburn's poetry proves to be unworthy of the hopes he placed in her. The society which he had succeeded in joining also disappoints him. But there is no way back; there is only one way out: through the cabin porthole into the sea. . . .

Zakhar develops under infinitely worse conditions. Martin's ascetic life would have seemed the acme of comfort to him. And chiefly, Zakhar belongs to those people who, as a certain American Socialist once said, do not grow from the ranks but in the ranks. He learns from his own people, they are his support and mainstay; he is bound to them with his whole being, he never has broken and never will break this tie.

There we have a society of separate individuals, of private, egoistical interests. Here, the road of Russian democracy lay through the fetters of tsarist Russia; an immeasurable load, but under it people were near and friendly to each other, under it the new, future Russia grew and strengthened.

All this is past history. But this history explains much of the present. Having had such a past, such historical experience, our country made the greatest of revolutions, and emerged from the trials and difficulties of the following years with honour and glory.

Zakhar sees many things in his life: the naval crew, Toulon, Genoa, Palermo, the

Captain's family, the messdeck of the armoured cruiser, and he comes to know both the rough and the smooth side of all these things.

Zakhar, and with him the reader, makes the acquaintance of many persons of the most varied character and social rank. Each one of these is described in great detail, both as to appearance and mentality, face and figure.

As in his other books the writer attaches much importance to the description of his heroes' physique. Considering Novikov-Priboi's organic democracy, this attention is characteristic. The body is much more important and much more indicative of the individual than the clothes he wears. The writer devotes great attention to the strength or weakness of each individual he describes. Naturally, Novikov-Priboi does not idealize physical strength, but he is happy when physical strength accompanies moral strength. He never confuses strength with aggressiveness. Novikov-Priboi's characters need strength for their work, to defend themselves and to fight for all that is best in life. Novikov-Priboi values strength as a quality of the democratic man. His valuation of people is determined by his social sympathies and antipathies which often acquire a tangible expression.

The smooth kaleidoscope of pictures of Russian life before the Revolution is knitted together into a story with an interesting plot and ideas that are vivid and full of profound meaning.

Zakhar has risen to his point of vantage from the masses, as their representative as a witness and a judge. He looks with wise eyes at the life of the ruling classes, and his observations are now full of humour, now indignant and angry.

One of the main points in his reasoning is the question of man and his place: to what extent are people suited to the positions they hold?

The circle of his observations becomes wider and wider and gradually he discovers a general rule: in that old, unjust, exploiting society in which he lives, everywhere in the service, on board ship, in all social relations, in the very system of the state he finds one and the same irrelevance—people do not answer to the demands made upon them by circumstances. On top are the men who hold their positions regardless of their abilities or rather lack of them, without any real right; while at the bottom, amongst the masses there are such abilities, such gifts, so many people who seem born to hold those positions. Zakhar Psaltyrev himself is one of these.

Between Zakhar and the position which he could and ought to hold lies the impassable gulf of social difference. But now and again for fleeting moments, strange bridges are thrown across this gap.

Zakhar is Captain Lezvin's orderly. Lezvin is an honest man, critical of the tsarist regime, but under the influence of personal misfortune and official injustice he has deteriorated. But on a certain occasion Lezvin issues an order of the day: "I have noticed . . . the rollers on which the turrets revolve are rusty . . . in loading the 12-inch guns the crew do not work together. . . ." and so

all the mistakes and shortcomings are noted. This order-of-the-day is followed by others; the inspector who has profited on the crew's rations is exposed; Count Everling is arrested for his abusive behaviour to the sailors; corporal punishment is forbidden. Discipline improves and the formerly neglected ship becomes a model one.

All of this, however, does not proceed from the Captain himself. But it is he who introduces and checks up on the fulfillment of all these measures, which were suggested to him by his orderly Zakhar Psaltyrev. It is not he who has "noticed" all these shortcomings, but Zakhar. The orderly Psaltyrev is the true commander of the armoured cruiser. He makes an excellent commander.

"Take any commander: what does he do? Once a fortnight or on some holiday occasion he inspects the vessel. But what can he alone see?"

Had Psaltyrev looked at the ship from the point of view of a certain, narrow speciality or calling he also would have seen but little. But as we already know, he is interested in everything. He wanders all over the ship, inspects and studies everything, talks to the men busy at the different jobs, men of different professions and trades. "I look with a hundred eyes, think with a hundred minds."

Zakhar's support is a whole world of practical labour. Those who work know how to handle the objects of their trade, understand them, and the dumb objects seem to know these skilled hands and to obey them willingly. The worker himself is the most important productive force. The administration of the production process—whether in agriculture, in a factory or aboard an armoured cruiser—becomes more perfect the more democratic the social regime is, the nearer the leaders of production come to this understanding and knowledge, the nearer they are to the working experience of the millions, the better they are able to amass and summarize this experience.

The productive possibilities of democracy are being revealed in our country in mass inventions, in shock work, in the Stakhanov movement. In old Russia the administration was separated from the workers by practically impermeable walls.

Lezvin sees and understands the great abilities of the man before him. But what can he do? In other times, he tells his orderly, "perhaps I would have been your adjutant." And now? "I can only promote you to the rank of petty officer. Higher you cannot go."

Zakhar does not want honour or a profitable place. He wants the work he loves. But even this secret commandship of his does not last long. Lezvin is removed from the armoured cruiser (Count Everling takes his revenge), and Lezvin's orderly goes with him.

Lezvin spends his days in sleeping and his nights in drinking. He hates the officers and he has no friends. He has no one to talk to except Zakhar. When the table is laid for supper with wine and the numerous Russian "zakuski" (hors d'oeuvre), he bids the orderly to don his own, captain's uniform, and addresses him in Russian fashion by name

and patronymic, using the polite "you" instead of "thou" and demands to be addressed by name and patronymic instead of the customary "your honour". They sit at table like equals.

These details serve to bring out the singularity of the whole situation. Phantasy and reality have merged. In reality, Zakhar is the true captain: the uniform, the polite address are in accordance with his true state; yet at the same time, this is only imaginary, a masquerade caused by another man's whim.

In the end this masquerade costs him dear. . . . When his master dies unexpectedly, Zakhar runs for a doctor without stopping to take off the captain's uniform; the general opinion is that he has killed the captain and stolen his clothes. Only with great difficulty does he succeed in establishing his innocence.

This mixture of the real and the unreal runs through the book. Admiral Zheleznov, the father of Zakhar's sweetheart, has children by his legal wife. In reality they are not his own, but he regards them as such, while nobody, except the girl's mother and Zakhar, knows who his real daughter is. In the same way, nobody except Lezvin knows that Psaltyrev was the real captain.

Even his name Psaltyrev is not real. It was a nickname earned by his father when prevented by illness from working any longer, he was forced to go from house to house reading the psalms for the dead. (Psaltyr in Russian means "book of psalms.") The nickname became established in the passport and the true name was lost.

Thus, although the novel is so realistic it yet recalls a fairy tale. In a fairy tale everybody gets what he deserves; the peasant triumphs over the landlord, the stepdaughter escapes the persecutions of her wicked step-mother. The brother who has been disdained or who was doomed like the biblical Joseph or Russian Ivan the Fool, comes out on top. The poor become rich, the common people prove to be wiser and better than the rich and learned. In fairy tales and in other old works of fiction written in a fantastic vein we often meet with this motif; as the result of exceptional circumstances the poor man finds himself holding a high and responsible position and displays remarkable, unprecedented abilities (a classic example is Sancho Panza as governor of the city).

Sailors have also been the heroes of such situations. Shergin in his *Archangel Novels* tells us of sailors who become the governors of more or less imaginary lands. This book was published comparatively recently but its theme has come down to us from the 18th century; we find the skill and wisdom of the sailor highly lauded in *The Story of the Russian Sailor Vassili Kariotsky and the Beautiful Queen Iraklia of Florence*.

The expectations of the people, expressed through the medium of the fairy tale, are no vain dreams. These wishes are being granted by history. The fairy tale is coming true. This has already happened in our country. The people have access to those spheres of work and life which were formerly closed to them, and they are proving their abilities.

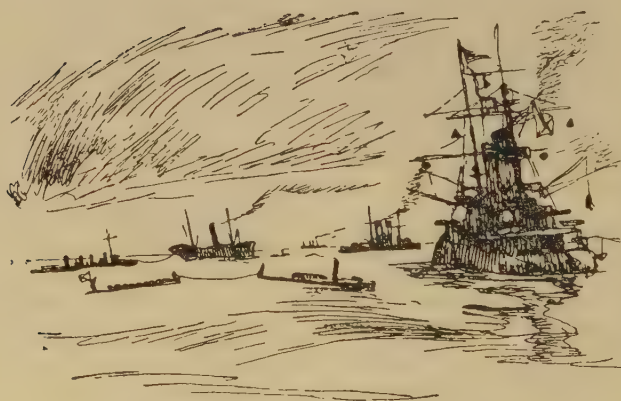
Great events, like a hurricane, passed over the land changing not only the people

but the very face of the earth. By the logic of our reality and the author's conception we were to meet the hero of his novel again, later, holding the position for which he is fit—a real and fully-authorized Captain, fighting in the Revolution, in the Great Patriotic War. Death, however, cut short the author's plans. Only the first chapters of the second part of the book were written and published: Zakhar reappears after the Revolution and the Civil War. The reader sees the new Soviet fleet—a grim, powerful force, guarding the shores of our Socialist homeland. New people and new relations. A great battleship with powerful, up-to-date equipment and arms. The ship's library containing 20,000 volumes. The wonderful mass bathing scene—the young, vigorous bodies of the crew, their skill, their merry laughter—“Even the ancient Greeks did not know such merriment.” At this happy holiday, our old friend reappears, not as Psaltyrev but bearing his real name Kulinov. He resumes his story; he tells us what happened to Admiral Zheleznov, in 1917. Zakhar succeeded in showing

Zheleznov the social and personal deception under which he was living. Zheleznov openly declares to Zakhar: “A revolution has taken place in my soul, as in the country. I will serve the people.” What about Zakhar himself? “He worked much for the Revolution, faced death more than once, and the Revolution did not fail to reward him, giving him what he had not even dreamed of: the rank of captain and commander of a magnificent Soviet battleship.

Novikov-Priboi was a great artist. His merits are seriousness and sincerity, an absolute sense of truth, mental firmness and delicacy, profound understanding of comradeship and friendship, his great love of his people. His books are true popular epics. And the foreign reader, wishing to gain an insight into the nature of the Soviet people, their growth and their victories, cannot afford to overlook Novikov-Priboi's works. The simplicity of great art, the wonderful humour, the democracy inherent in the author make him one of the best Soviet writers.

VLADIMIR ALEXANDROV



Pavlinov's engravings for Tsushima

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET LITERATURE AND SOME OF ITS PROBLEMS

To Soviet people their victory in the recent war was not only a triumph of their arms but also a victory of the ethics and culture developed by the socialist way of life in the U.S.S.R.

The great attention that is being paid to ideology, is a noticeable feature of Soviet life today; this is a perfectly normal circumstance in a state whose leaders have always had the education of the people at heart. The ideological growth of millions of people, the consistent training of the youth in the spirit of those splendid ideals which were the mainstay of the people during a war period of immeasurable difficulty, and which brought them victory—these are conditions necessary for the further development of the land of socialism. Literature has an important place in our post-war development and in the heroic task of building up a communist society.

In the autumn of 1946 there appeared in the Soviet press a number of decisions adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after the leadership of the Party had conferred with prominent workers in literature, the theatre and the cinema. These decisions outline the nature of the tasks confronting the arts and letters, and by means of a concrete criticism of some harmful or unsuccessful works explain which tendencies are inimical to healthy development.

An important contribution was made by Andrei Zhdanov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in his report on the Leningrad magazines *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* both of which had shortly before published the reactionary writings of Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko.

"Soviet writers, and all workers in the field of ideology," said Zhdanov, "are today in the firing line; under conditions of peaceful development the tasks set the ideological front do not disappear but become even greater—this applies especially to literature. The people, the state and the Party do not want our literature to withdraw from contemporaneity but, on the contrary, to plunge actively into all aspects of Soviet life."

"The Bolsheviks place a very high value on literature and have a clear conception of its great historical mission and its role in strengthening the moral and political unity of the people, in rallying the people and in educating them. The Central Committee of the Party wants to see a flourishing spiritual culture for it regards the development of a rich culture as one of the most important tasks of socialism."

This Bolshevik view of literature and its tasks is based on more than a century's experience of the progressive and democratic traditions of Russian literature. Ever since the new literature found form in Russia—since the end of the 18th century—the works of all great writers have reflected the social

problems which arose out of the people's struggle for emancipation. This tradition has been inherited and developed by Soviet literature which is growing up together with the people, with the Soviet state, the people's state which is building a classless society. The hopes of many generations of Russian progressive writers—from Pushkin and Radishchev to Maxim Gorky—have been realized in the Soviet system of society.

"Russian literature was very strong in its democracy," wrote Maxim Gorky in all justice, "in its impassioned effort to solve the tasks of social being, its proclamation of the ideals of humanity, its songs dedicated to liberty, its profound interest in the life of the people . . . its persistent search for a universal, refreshing truth."

Lenin and Stalin, the leaders of the Soviet people, always recognized the tremendous social significance of literature and saw in the works of the best writers a sound support for socialism. Class society, however, had its internal contradictions, and its literature was, therefore, divided; the dominant exploiting classes corrupted literature and made an important section of it a mouthpiece for the propagation of reactionary ideas.

Literature cannot be apolitical even if it dons the mask of "art for art's sake," supposedly indifferent to politics. The preaching of complete indifference to all "politics", that is, to the fate of the people, is in itself a policy. Every form of art is an active instrument for ideological education of the people on either progressive or reactionary lines. On the eve of the October Revolution, in the period of political reaction that followed the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, the commonest forms of art, those which were available on a large scale, were all connected with bourgeois decadence. The literary foreground was occupied by small but loudly advertised schools and circles, symbolists and their offspring, the acmeists, futurists and others. Their dubious success, confined to petit bourgeois theatre-goers and decadent *salons*, very naturally coincided with what Gorky called "the most untalented decade" in the history of the Russian bourgeois intelligentsia. The writings of the champions of these trends in literature—Merezhkovsky, Gippius, Sollogub and others of lesser calibre were permeated with hatred and contempt for the people and with a fear of the growing role which the people were playing in the history of Russia. Merezhkovsky, for whom the "prophets" of western decadence still have a kind word, greeted the impending revolution with hysterical profanity calling the people marching forward to liberty "the oncoming canaille."

Their remoteness from and enmity for the people naturally brought these literary groups into sharp opposition with the democratic and realistic art traditions of Russian and world literature. They looked for social, philosophical and esthetic support in the reaction-

any ideas of the Neo-Kantians, the Nietzscheans and even the Theosophists and the Anthroposophists. They found examples for their writings in the formalist-esthetic schools of the West which flourished at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. These children of the third and fourth generation of the formalists pretended to be innovators in literature but they were only chewing the old Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean cud.

The tragedy experienced in their creative work by many great poets who were killed by the *fin de siècle* disintegration, is only one more sin added to the long list for which the decadent movement was responsible. The story of such artists as Alexander Blok who were able to fight their way through the slough of decadence to a literature that was loyal to mankind and to the people, confirmed the fact that the path taken by progressive literature is the historically correct one.

It is, then, no wonder that the Bolshevik critics and Maxim Gorky (who even in his youth was able to see through the decadents with great penetration—his article *P. Verlaine and the Decadents*, for example) struggled persistently against literature of the *fin de siècle* and defended and revived the great classical traditions. It was, however, not merely a matter of revival. The literary collapse was brought about by the reactionary deterioration of society at a time when capitalism was just entering its new phase—imperialism. The Renaissance of the arts and letters could only be effected on a new social basis.

Some twelve years before the Great October Socialist Revolution Lenin indicated the specific feature of literature in a society which had freed itself from the ulcer of private property.

"This will be a free literature," he wrote, "because not avarice and ambition but the idea of socialism and sympathy for the working people will recruit more and more new forces for it. This will be a free literature because it will not serve the sated heroine or the bored and obese 'upper ten thousand,' but the millions and tens of millions of working people who are the flower of the country, its strength and its future. . . ."

Soviet literature is proud of its mission as a progressive literature, of the fact that it serves to provide the people with a communist education, that it has begun to fulfill the great role of service to the whole people which Lenin forecast for it.

The people that has become master of the land, especially the rising generation cannot be indifferent to what they read or what they see on the cinema screen and the stage. In view of this the organizations of the Soviet people and Soviet critics have to maintain a sharp watch over the ideological and moral principles that are the essence of creative art and must be exacting in the demands they make of form in art; they must struggle against vulgar triviality in all its forms. Workers in the arts and letters, united in groups for creative work, must use comradely criticism and mutual support to give a socialist and humanist direction to all forms of Soviet art.

Some important successes have been achieved

in Soviet arts and letters. In the field of literature, for example, we have such chef d'oeuvres as *The Artamonovs* and *The By-stander* by Maxim Gorky, *The Road to Calvary* and *Imperial Majesty (Peter the Great)* by Alexei Tolstoy, *And Quiet Flows the Don* and *Soil Upturned* by Mikhail Sholokhov and, more recently, *The Young Guard* by Alexander Fadeyev.

At the international cinema festival held recently at Cannes, Soviet pictures were awarded the greatest number of prizes. Amongst the prize-winning pictures were *The Great Turning Point* (first national prize), *The Stone Flower* (the best coloured film), *The Sunny Tribe* (best scientific-educational film), *Berlin* (the best documentary).

The achievements of the Soviet theatre have been universally acknowledged and the high standard of acting on the Soviet stage is well known. Plays that were first produced during the war—Alexander Korneichuk's *Front*, Constantin Simonov's *The Russians* and Leonid Leonov's *Invasion* are very popular with large audiences.

In a country where the arts are so highly esteemed, where they play such an important educational role, it is only fitting that there should be protests when certain writers, theatre and cinema workers display a sense of irresponsibility to their work.

"The writer is the engineer of the human soul," said Stalin, speaking of Soviet writers.

Can writers, then, be permitted to cripple the human soul instead of properly educating it? Can they be allowed to hinder and counteract the people in their arduous but noble work of construction instead of using their creative art to help them?

The choice between the great traditions of Russian arts and letters, between the heritage of Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky, between socialist humanism on the one hand and the bourgeois decadent degradation of man on the other does not present any special difficulties to workers in the arts and letters who are living in the Soviet Union.

This explains why the literary works of Mikhail Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova— they represent different tendencies but are both equally alien to Soviet literature—have met with such an outspoken public rebuff.

The disfigurement, degradation and besmirching of man has never been deemed worthy of a writer. In our own days, when the people have learned in the bloody fight against fascism how dangerous it is cynically to cast man down from his pedestal, the writer who slanders the very nature of man cannot find a place in the ranks of the progressive writers.

In 1943, when the war was at its height, Zoshchenko offered his readers the story *Before Sunrise*, a piece of writing that earned great notoriety and which was subjected to very severe criticism. This story appeared at a time when the Soviet people had mustered all their forces on the battlefield and the front of labour, when the thoughts and feelings of every man and woman who was not either a traitor or a social outcast, were fixed day and night on the titanic battles that were deciding the future of mankind. This was shortly after the battle of Stalingrad. Zoshchenko chose this time to make excursions into the

details of his past life, to smack his lips over vulgar amorous adventures and to maintain, under the very obvious influence of Freud that there is some kind of biological fear inherent in the soul of man which determines all his acts and all his impulses. Zoshchenko's opus naturally gave rise to disgust and dissatisfaction amongst Soviet readers whose lives were governed by fearlessness and not by fear, who were not given to the solitary contemplation of dark, subconscious impulses but who devoted all their life to the selfless, conscious struggle for their country and for the liberty of all nations.

One would have expected that the general condemnation of this work would have made an impression on Zoshchenko. Nevertheless he continued writing in the same spirit of the decadent humiliation of man. His *Adventures of an Ape* in which he almost openly ridiculed the people who had suffered all the vicissitudes of war, aroused the especial indignation of the Soviet public.

"Creative writing" of this type is not a new departure for Zoshchenko. In the early twenties he was a member of a group of writers who called themselves the "Serapion Brothers"; this group openly championed the idea of apolitical writing. "I have this to say about myself," wrote Zoshchenko; "I am not a Communist, I am not a Socialist-Revolutionary or a Monarchist, I am simply . . . politically amoral."

A number of the writers from this group broke away from the "hermit Serapion's" commandments but Zoshchenko continued to live in this spiritual desert. This "politically amoral" writer, as he called himself, created ugly caricatures of the Soviet man, of the man who is in actual fact the diametrical opposite of Zoshchenko's heroes—all this he did under the excuse of "criticizing philistinism." Even inveterate lovers of Zoshchenko's misanthropic laughter can scarcely deny the fact that he has become so immersed in his one hero, the malicious and stupid philistine, that he no longer notices the existence of other people.

Anna Akhmatova began writing at a time when a section of the Russian bourgeois intelligentsia, scared by the revolution of 1905, wandered off into the swamp of reaction. Forebodings of doom, mysticism mixed with pornography, were typical of the decadent literature of that period; Anna Akhmatova was a typical writer of this coterie.

Even in Soviet times Anna Akhmatova retained all the methods used in the decadent poetry that blighted the esthetic salons in the early decades of this century. The few verses which she wrote under the influence of the war against fascism do not in any way show that she has rejected reactionary passivism and spiritual sterility.

Her latest verses are a repetition of the old. Not long ago Akhmatova wrote of herself as of a "Lethan shade"; these lines are interesting as characteristic of her own view of the world and of the place which she holds amongst modern poets.

The Soviet public had every right to raise the question—what can Zoshchenko and Akhmatova give the people, with what can they interest a younger generation that has to

grow up bold and clean and clearly conscious of the road it has to take?

The writings of Zoshchenko and Akhmatova are harmful not only because they corrupt the psychology of man, the fighter and man, the builder, not only because they inculcate in the youth views of life that are foreign to our society; but also because they could not help but influence literature by attempting to deflect it from the noble task of true service to the people and divert it into the slough of esthetic falsity and malicious philistinism.

When critics examine attempts to revive obsolete and rotten ideas they cannot console themselves with the fact that it is only a matter of a few isolated manifestations in literature. The obsolete and the rotten are not inclined to disappear of their own accord and voluntarily clear the way for the new and progressive.

In our world today the past is by far not everywhere the past. The more the past has to manoeuvre in the struggle against the new forms of democratic life that are arising throughout Europe the greater the fury with which it defends itself. Progressive literature in the West feels keenly these attacks of reaction, these attempts of the dead to grasp at the living. Soviet writers are also following this process and realize that the reality of the new world cannot be depicted in literature by borrowing corrupt forms which in actual fact died in the hands of their creators. This problem was clearly formulated by the Soviet novelist, Alexander Fadeyev, at a meeting of Moscow writers.

"The literary depiction of the new," said Fadeyev, "is closely connected with the problem of form. It must not be forgotten that in the sphere of form we, Soviet writers, are real innovators and that the views of the formalists are those of backward people. If we honestly analyze from the standpoint of form all those corrupt Russian and West-European schools of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary period, we find two tendencies that are at first glance opposites but which are both equally harmful to our literature. The first is the cold rigidity of form, rigid, heavyweight verses and iron prose. Genuine realism responds freely and simply to all manifestations of reality and was always an innovator in the matter of forms.

"Can one possibly imagine anything more 'tendencious' and at the same time effortless and therefore genuine innovation than the works of Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Balzac, Nekrasov, Saltykov-Shchedrin and many other great realists of the past? And the freedom and fullness of expression in Gorky! It is not a matter of looseness of form but of the free and complete expression of new ideas, of a new content.

"The second tendency is absolute subjectivism, the collapse of form, such as one sees, in particular today, in the writings of some modern West-European and American writers.

"In our struggle for better quality and better form we must begin from the other end—with the new thoughts, with men of a new type, with new manifestations of reality. If we analyze the best of everything that has been created in our literature from this point of view,

then we may say that its forms are, unusual and are worthy of special investigation."

The astounding skill of the Russian realist writers in depicting man in his surroundings, the passion of Stendhal and the creative strength of Balzac, all are directed towards the ruthless exposure of bourgeois society, its institutions, ideas and morals. These great artists were the "prodigal sons" of the bourgeoisie; the cynicism and banality of bourgeois society, the selfishness of the man whose ideals, as Flaubert said, are concentrated in the stomach and the purse, were unacceptable to them.

The literature of socialist realism is the literature of a society that has liberated itself from bourgeois relations. In the new society there is not that antagonism between the writer and society which characterizes the relations of the best writers of the past to bourgeois society.

The best Russian democratic writers and critics tried by their writings to overthrow the old order for the sake of a better, more intelligent system; today, when this system has become an accomplished fact all honest writers are naturally trying to use their talents to help strengthen the socialist system, to help the people progress towards communism.

The most important task of the arts and letters of Socialist realism is the true, sincere and understanding representation of the deeds of the Soviet man.

A leap into the future, a tendency that once characterized the romanticists and led them

away from reality, is now becoming an original, specific feature of the literature of socialist realism. This is no longer a "yearning for the unattainable ideal" but a dream of the future whose reality is deep-rooted in the present.

"The fundamental conflict of the epoch," said Fadeyev in the same speech, "the conflict of the new socialist way of life with all obsolete ideas, with all the manifestations of the past, takes on many and varied forms. In depicting the past, that is, the negative to put it conventionally, there are greater traditions than there are in the depiction of the new; until the writer has mastered the new, i. e., that which is positive, how can he give a solution to this conflict in his writings? Only he who has a thorough knowledge of contemporary positive fundamentals and who looks ahead, is able to show to the fullest extent the greatness and tension and difficulties of struggle in this conflict of the epoch. In this is to be found the great significance of 'revolutionary romanticism' and 'socialist realism.' "

The prospects of gigantic works of construction are being unfolded before the eyes of Soviet people. In this magnificent task of building up communist society the arts and letters have a tremendous role to play. The broadest discussion on questions of literature and art at meetings of writers, theatre, cinema and press workers, and in research institutions, shows the interest with which men of the arts and letters are tackling the greatest spiritual task of our times.

VICTOR NIKOLAYEV

NEW BOOKS

A NOVEL ABOUT COUNTRY LIFE

Pyotr Zamoytsky. *Youth*. A Novel. Soviet Writer Publishing House. Moscow. 310 pages. *Youth* is an autobiographical novel by P. Zamoytsky, one of the oldest of Soviet authors whose works describe the village and the life of the peasants.

Before the Revolution Zamoytsky was in turn shepherd, tavern waiter and clerk. In his novel *Youth* he tells how he returns in 1916 an invalid from the war to his native Penza village.

A self-taught man, he is elected village registrar by the rural community. When the Revolution comes, he and his comrades, all ex-soldiers, representatives of the rural poor, begin to carry out the policy of the Bolshevik Party in the village.

The most interesting part of the novel is the depiction of the village in the period between the February and October revolutions of 1917. Zamoytsky vividly describes the appropriation of the land—how it was wrested from the kulaks and landowners and turned over to the impoverished peasants. He tells about the struggle between the villagers and the landowner Klimov, fraternization between the peasants and the soldiers sent to put down the uprising.

The author's youthful romances lend a lyrical touch to the novel. Pyotr falls in love with Lena, a young peasant girl, but their happiness is short-lived; they are cruelly separated by Lena's rich sister. Then he meets the village schoolteacher Sonya, a vivacious girl of a sarcastic disposition. Their friendship soon blossoms into love.

October 1917. Pyotr and his comrades and other fellow-villagers only recently returned from the army, set out for the city to free members of the Bolshevik Conference who had been imprisoned by the authorities.

On the night when the men are liberated by a skillful manoeuvre of Pyotr's detachment, news is received from the centre to the effect that all power has passed into the hands of the Soviets.

Pyotr plays a prominent part in the seizure of power in the regional city by the Bolsheviks. Immediately afterwards he sets about organizing a Bolshevik newspaper. He realizes that bitter struggle lies ahead.

In the last pages we see Pyotr and his friends as members of an armed expedition to a village where the enemies of the Soviet state have organized an uprising.

The novel is written very simply and makes absorbing reading. The "sketches from life", which show us the first steps of the Socialist Revolution in the village, are especially interesting.

POET OF RUSSIAN NATURE

Mikhail Prishvin. *Selected Works*. State Literary Publishing House. Moscow. 553 pages.

Mikhail Prishvin, the author, has recently celebrated his 73rd birthday. Beginning his career at the dawn of the century, he has

written many novels, stories and poems about "eternally youthful nature". Alive and vivid, his works are not easily forgotten.

Prishvin's first writings appeared in the press in 1905. An agronomist and later an anthropologist by inclination, this hunter, traveller and young searcher in the realms of nature made his literary debut with the story *Region of Unfrightened Birds*. This remarkable book about the Russian North was written after long travels in the Karelian forests, along the shores of the Arctic Ocean and of Lake Onega—places comparatively little known at that time. Prishvin spent the greater part of his life in travel, visited every section of his country from the woods of Moscow Region to the Ussuri Taiga, from the frozen shores of the Arctic to the southern ranges of the Kabardino-Balkaria Mountains. Each of his works, therefore, is coloured by impressions of journeys carefully preserved in his diary.

An explorer, fascinated by the "secrets of the earth" and the magic of active nature, Prishvin has been tirelessly searching for the "principles of life's creative effort."

"People generally say to the earth: 'We are yours.' But you say to her: 'You are mine...'" When I read your works I am happy, I laugh. It is all so wonderful!" It was thus that Maxim Gorky briefly defined the poetic essence of Mikhail Prishvin's work.

The volume of Prishvin's selected works contains his most popular stories: *Kashchei's Chain*, *Ginseng* (Root of Life), *Spring Unadorned*, the poem *Facelia* and many children's stories.

The novel *Kashchei's Chain*, one of the author's earliest, is an autobiographical account of the difficult path he travelled as an artist, of his tireless probings into the true meaning and joy of life. The search for the truths of life and art in communion with



Cover for
Selected
Works by
Prishvin

nature and the common people who love the earth found further expression in his novel *Ginseng* written in 1933.

This is a poem of the organization of deer farming on the preserves in the heart of the Ussuri Taiga, the dangerous and fascinating occupation of taming wild animals. Men were engaged in this work at the dawn of history and have returned to it again, enriched by experience. The plot is simple: the search for "the root of life," for *Ginseng* in the taiga. The novel is remarkable both for its lyrical descriptions of nature and the philosophical meditations of its hero.

"As one who is engaged in the new culture," wrote Prishvin, "I feel that the natural taiga has imparted the root of life to us and our creative endeavour and that the searcher for the root of life is nearer to his goal in the realms of art and science than those who seek the archaic roots in the wild taiga."

Prishvin's novel, *Spring Unadorned*, was first published in 1940.

"I recall the dream of my childhood," he wrote, "to set a house on wheels and ride away to the never-never land of unfrightened birds and animals." It is precisely about such a trip of a house on wheels (a plywood shack on a truck) to the little settlement of Vezhi, where Nekrasov once loved to hunt, that the novel was written. It is an exact account of the author's abundant observations "in all storeys of the forest," his impressions of life on the earth, amid the roots and crowns of the trees, on the banks and in the depths of the rivers, in the meadows and the forest clearings.

It is as difficult to retell a poem in prose *Facelia* as a full-length story *A Dewdrop in the Forest*. The books consist of short sketches, little scenes, patterns of thought prompted by poetic and optimistic impressions of nature.

A considerable part of Prishvin's selected works is devoted to his hunting stories written at various periods, his series of tales written during the Patriotic War and his stories for children.

His children's stories reveal Prishvin not only as a poet and student of nature, but a profound connoisseur of child psychology. In these works, however, it is not the child alone whom he is addressing, but also that child which lives on in every normal adult. His wonderful children's books, therefore, make a strong appeal to all readers, young and old,

TALES OF METALLURGY

Alexander Beck. *The Iron Workers*. Soviet Writer Publishing House. Moscow. 327 pages.

The tales of Alexander Beck, compiled in his new book *The Iron Workers*, are indeed a history of blast furnace development in Russia in the 20th century, before and after the October Revolution.

Varied in style, some of the author's accounts present a comprehensive picture of the industrial south, of the complex, often contradictory development of privately owned iron works. Others outline the history of

individual enterprises. Still others take the form of diaries and the memoirs of veteran blast furnace operators. The connecting thread is the documentary data to which the whole adheres so strictly.

Beck's chief characters are the pioneers of iron smelting in the south and east of Russia, the first of the big metallurgical specialists in the country. The names of many of them appear in different stories.

The author has not restricted himself to the story of iron production. He has also described the lives of the men who were passionately engrossed in its problems, whose labours laid the foundation of Russia's mighty iron and steel industry.

Most remarkable among his stories of the pre-revolutionary period are: *Kurako*, and *Tale of a Night*. In the first, dealing with the earliest iron works in the Kuznetsk Basin as in the second, depicting life and labour in the large Novorossiisk plant, the author builds up his story around the engineer Mikhail Kurako, a brilliant innovator. This man climbed all the rungs of the steel worker's art, from messenger boy to department chief. Having spent the first half of his life as a worker, he consecrates his later years to the struggle against the greedy foreign and later the Russian owners of the iron-work merciless exploiters of cheap labour. It was the dream of Kurako and his successors to create a first-class Russian iron industry, mighty blast furnaces, safe to life and limb.

Exiled after the 1905 Revolution, Kurako eventually returned to the Donets Basin and later went to work in the iron works in Siberia. From the first days of the October Revolution, he devoted all his energies to the restoration of the Soviet republic's iron and steel industry. His life at this period is not unlike that of many other leading Russian engineers.

Kurako and his "Kurakovites" (the group of workers who wandered with him from plant to plant) were soon known throughout South Russia. Their mission was to infuse new technical ideas into production, to introduce up-to-date methods of mechanization, to ease the labour of the steel workers.

The early years of the famous steel worker Ivan Korobov, were very much like those of Kurako. Both did the same backbreaking and precarious job, were scorched and scarred by the molten metal when it broke through the worn walls of the furnaces and both were deeply engrossed in their labour, the creation of metal, mighty and yet submissive.

Ivan Korobov spent more than half of his life in the Makeyevka Plant when it was privately owned, but lived to see the Revolution transfer this enterprise to the hands of the workers. It was then that he found himself one of the masters of the gigantic works.

Everybody in the Soviet Union knows about the Korobov family of steel workers, the father and his three sons, two of them in charge of large iron and steel plants and the third, chief of a metallurgical research institute. The story of their lives is the story of iron in the Soviet south and illustrates, as nothing else could do, just how technical progress in Socialist economy fosters prosper-

ly, the development of social consciousness and culture among the working people.

Ivan Korobov, patriarch steel worker, has been elected a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.

THE LIFE OF AN EXPLORER

Sergei Markov. *Great Hunter. Smolensk State Publishing House.* 105 pages.

Great Hunter is a biography of the Russian traveller Nikolai Przhevalski. Presenting interesting data in geography and ethnography, this work conveys a lifelike picture of the scientist and traveller who was the first to explore the vast territories of Central Asia, China, Mongolia and Tibet.

Przhevalski was born in 1839, on a small estate in the forests of Smolensk. "From this nest of mine I shall one day soar over the desert wastes of Asia," he wrote in his diary as a young officer of the Military Academy.

Preparing very diligently for his future activities, he astonished his fellow students by the ardour with which he pored over the works of the great geographers, zoologists and botanists night after night. Before he had made his first journey, Przhevalski, when a young teacher of the Warsaw Cadet School, wrote a geography textbook which was later employed by the students of the University of Peking, when the scientist became known in China.

As a youth Przhevalski had dreamed of exploring Africa. In time his ambitions changed, however, and his first journeys were not made in the "dark continent," but in the remote sections of his own country, the unexplored Valley of the Ussuri. His collection of hitherto unknown birds, animals and plants, his geographical discoveries and exploits in the Maritime Taiga attracted the attention of the Russian Geographical Society and Przhevalski tasted the first fruits of success. He was especially pleased with the modest funds placed at his disposal for further travel.

In 1870 Przhevalski began his famous expedition to the "Stone Gates of Tibet", the arid wastes of Mongolia and the wild mountain ranges of Central Asia.

With a small caravan he set forth for the plains of Ordos, "the great clay threshold to the picturesque valleys of China." Many difficulties lay in his way: water that had been heated by the sun to 70° Centigrade, tropical torrents followed by impenetrable curtains of steam, sand storms and cyclones, rocky heights baked in the sun by day and frozen in the winds by night. More than once the explorer was compelled to reach for his rifle to repel the attacks of wild tribesmen in the foothills of Tibet.

Though Przhevalski reached the vicinity of Lhasa, capital of Tibet where no European had been before him, he lost his camels which could not endure the rarified air at this altitude of 13,500 feet, nearly as high as Mont Blanc, and had therefore to turn back. The return journey was made over the most desolate sections of the Gobi. This area where the temperature rose to 45° Centigrade in the shade and the earth was scorched

to 63° Centigrade was crossed by the Russian explorer in 44 marches.

Przhevalski spent three years in the desert, covered 11,000 versts, mostly on foot, and brought his valuable collection safely home.

The area extending from the frontiers of Russia to the upper reaches of the Blue River could no longer be designated by a white spot on the map. Przhevalski had filled in all the details.

The explorer made three more expeditions to the heart of Central Asia. He explored the eastern spurs of the Tian-Shan ranges and the basin of the Tarim River, discovered the errant Lake Lob-Nor, mentioned only in the notes of Marco Polo and the Asiatic historians. Once more, he reached the vicinity of Lhasa, made there new discoveries and acquainted the world with the two high mountain ranges of Nan-Shan. To use his own words, he "unraveled the tangled knots of the Kusi-Lun." He named the two newly discovered mountain ridges after Columbus and Marco Polo. High in northern Tibet he discovered yet another range which he called the "Mysterious". Very appropriately this range was subsequently named after him.

Russia showed her appreciation of her valiant explorer. The Russian Academy of Sciences coined a medal bearing his portrait over the words: "To the first explorer of Central Asia." Przhevalski's name came to be known far and wide in Europe. The French geographers invited him to the geographers' congress in Paris. The Swedes presented him with the "Vega" medal; the Italians, with a gold medal. Returning from his travels, however, Przhevalski preferred the solitude of the Smolensk forests to the most brilliant receptions and there, in his quiet home, wrote his works and prepared for fresh journeys of discovery.

Przhevalski set out on his fifth and last expedition at the age of 49 hoping this time to reach mysterious Lhasa. He told his friends that he was willing to stake his life on the attainment of such a goal rather than stay at home. He died half way to his destination on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul.

NEW BOOK ABOUT SUVOROV

Kirill Pigarev. *Soldier-General. State Literary Publishing House.* Moscow. 173 pages.

Kirill Pigarev's new book is comprised of articles on the life, activities and literary legacy of Alexander Suvorov.

The first of the articles deals mainly with the military side of Suvorov and his successors, the men who carried into effect and preserved those principles of training, which were set down by Peter the Great in his famous military code. The second is devoted to Suvorov's precept on the dignity of an officer. The third deals with Suvorov, the military writer and educator of the Russian soldier.

The most important, from the historic and literary points of view, is the article *Attack by Word and Pen*, presenting Suvorov as a military writer and founder of this school of literature in Russia.

One of the most highly educated men of

his times, the general was thoroughly versed in history and philosophy (particularly of the ancients) and spoke eight languages. Himself exceedingly well read, he urged the value of reading on his officers and always took his books with him on his campaigns.

As a soldier of the Semyonov Regiment in St. Petersburg, the young Suvorov was associated with the "Lovers of Russian Literature Society" headed by the writers Sumarokov and Kheraskov. An issue of the Society's monthly periodical, published in 1755, carried two articles signed "A.S.", Suvorov's initials. The first was called *Alexander the Great Converses With Herostatus in the Nether World*, the second, *Conversation Between Cortez and Montezuma*. Both written by Suvorov, they were unpolished, but interesting in that they revealed the formation of his social views and moral principles.

The general's literary ties were not limited to his connections with the "Lovers of Russian Literature Society". The translator of Ossian and Homer, Ermil Kostrov, the Vyatka peasant who fought his way to the heights of scholarship and was one of the finest authorities on the Greek and Latin languages, was a friend with whom he corresponded regularly. Kostrov dedicated his translation of Ossian to Suvorov with the words: "You were ever a lover of the gentle muses." This was by no means empty flattery to a free-handed Maecenas.

Long years of friendship tied Suvorov with Derzhavin. One of the great poets of Russia at the turn of the 18th century, Derzhavin, was a "Suvorov bard" in the true sense of the word. Greatly attached to the general, he was as loyal to him in his days of disfavor as he was in his days of triumph.

In his later years Suvorov repeatedly attempted to "master the poetic form," particularly the epigram. He was more successful with the epistolary style however. His numerous, edifying letters are well known. The most important are: *Letter to Little Karachai*, the son of a favourite companion-in-arms, and his letter to the young officer Skripitsyn. Both are literary works in the psychological portrait manner popular at the time. In his letters Suvorov urges the young people to emulate the hero who "is daring without vehemence, swift without rashness, active without frivolity, obedient without humbleness, victorious without vain-glory, who is an enemy of envy, hatred and vengeance." He urged them to be loyal to their country, to be versed in the sciences and prepared for indefatigable activity.

Suvorov's most important literary contribution was his famous *Science of Victory*, a guide in the training of troops. It was written in 1768 when he was staying with the commander of the Suzdal Regiment.

The first part of *Science of Victory* is addressed to army commanders and the second, *Verbal Instructions*, to their soldiers. The *Verbal Instructions* pursues the double aim of teaching every soldier to understand his manoeuvres and of imbuing him with self-reliance.

To render his science comprehensible to

every soldier, Suvorov resorted to the popular language, couched his exhortations in the form of folk sayings and proverbs. His aphorisms were akin to the wise old popular maxims.

The driving impetus of Suvorov's actions accords well with his dynamic literary style:

"The enemy does not suspect us, believes we're a hundred versts away, and if we happen to be nowhere near, that we are 200, 300 versts and further. Suddenly we're on top of him, like a blizzard. His head begins to spin. Attack him then with all you've got, with whatever God gave you. The cavalry begins! Slash, stab, chase, cut off, hold 'em! Hurrah—the boys are doing wonders!" This is a regular attack in words.

Suvorov's military figures of speech are recorded in his reports. Invariably brief and direct, they lend spice to his private letters, his addresses to his soldiers.

Suvorov, army leader and military educator, founded a school of Russian military leaders. Preserving his behests for future generations of soldiers, the general's companions-in-arms and many military writers adopted the Suvorov literary style. The best of such works, General Dragomirov's writings, for example, are presented in an original literary form pervaded with the unique and tempestuous spirit of Suvorov.

MASTERS OF SOVIET ARCHITECTURE

Mikhail Ilyin. *Ivan Fomin*. 52 pages. S. Kaufman, *Vladimir Shchuko*. 68 pages, from the series of popular monographs under the editorship of Professor A. V. Bunin. *Publishing House of the Academy of Architecture of the U.S.S.R.* Moscow.

The works of the late Academician I. Fomin hold a place of importance in the history of 20th-century Russian architecture and particularly of Soviet architecture. One may say that the basis of his art is his love of the classics. The resurrection of Moscow classicism and its adaptation to new social and technical conditions, were the main tasks which the architect set himself in his search for a new Soviet architectural style.

V. Shchuko is a master of monumental architecture. His knowledge of architectural styles of the past has given him a keen feeling for ensemble, has enabled him to harmonize the new structures with the old without imitating the style of the latter. His design for the entrance of the Smolny Institute (government building in Leningrad since 1917) blends with the main portico of that edifice built 120 years previously by the architect Quarenghi.

Exceptionally interesting is the architect's work in the realm of the new, Soviet classicism as represented by his monumental projects of the Lenin Library in Moscow (which he designed in collaboration with the architect V. Gelfreikh) and the Palace of Soviets (designed with B. Iofan and V. Gelfreikh).

The monographs are well written, amply illustrated and contain detailed lists of the main works of the architects.

RESTORATION OF CITIES DESTROYED BY THE FASCISTS

Alexander Shchusev. *Project for the Restoration of Istra*. (From the series "Restoration of the Cities of the U.S.S.R."). Publishing House of the Academy of Architecture of the U.S.S.R. Moscow. 60 pages.

The restoration of the Soviet cities barbarously destroyed by the German invaders is one of the major features of the programme for the development of the national economy. Soviet architects have been called upon to harmonize the new industrial buildings, apartment houses and public buildings with the historical monuments which have survived in the ruined cities. The publication of the new projects by the Academy of Architecture of the U.S.S.R. will acquaint the general public with the problems and nature of reconstruction.

In drafting his plans for rebuilding Istra, Academician A. Shchusev has conceived of a garden city, a health resort for the people of Moscow.

In 1941 the Germans completely destroyed Istra and blew up its monastery museum, "New Jerusalem", an architectural monument of the 17th century. Not a building remained unscathed in the city.

Alexander Shchusev is an eminent authority on the restoration of architectural monuments and the architects under his guidance took careful measurements of the surviving fragments of the monastery. Due consideration was also given to the nature of the surrounding countryside.

The book dealing with the restoration of Istra contains several articles on the prospects for the city's development, the construction of its new buildings and parks. Particularly important is Professor S. V. Bessonov's *New Jerusalem Monastery*.

The numerous illustrations (draft projects, plans, measurements, water colours by Shchusev, photographs, etc.) convey a comprehensive idea of the work done by the architects.

Academician Evgeni Lanceret is responsible for the makeup of the book.

REMINISCENCES OF V. A. SEROV¹

Nikolai Ulyanov. *Reminiscences of Serov*. Art Publishing House. Moscow. 79 pages.

A pupil of the artist, Nikolai Ulyanov, tells in his memoirs of his student years with Serov and their further friendship until the latter's death.

The first chapter of the book describes the impression Serov produced upon the students of the Moscow School of Painting. Long before Serov took up teaching, the young artists had followed with interest his successes, which had caused quite a stir in Moscow artistic circles.

One day the director of the school, Prince Lvov, entered the studio and announced importantly:

"Gentlemen, Valentin Alexandrovich Serov will be here in a moment." Upon which

he left the room, to return soon with a man of average height, morose countenance, rather stockily built and somewhat awkward in manner.

Serov began his classes. Everything about him was unusual. He did not go into long-winded explanations of the students' mistakes as did the other instructors, but corrected them himself with a firm, sure hand.

The old models of the school were rejected, and Serov had others brought: these were youths with fine, sturdy bodies.

And then followed quite an unexpected sensation: the famous artist seated himself at the students' desks and began to work with them, demanding quick, accurate drawing.

The academic system at the school underwent a change. Students' work was now graded according to three categories. Under the first category came album pencil sketches, where an ability for observation and a good grasp of composition technique were evident, as well as large works in oil.

Later Serov set up his own studio at the school, taking with him the most gifted students.

The second chapter gives some of Serov's views on art, expressed during his conversations with the students.

"Why draw in the breadth? Wouldn't it be better to draw in depth? That's much too dashing, too much in the feuilleton manner.

"Keep your eyes wide open to see what is necessary. Grasp the whole. Take from nature only what is necessary. Search for its meaning.

"Resemblance to nature? Likeness? Of course, that's necessary; it's important, but that is not sufficient. Something else is wanted. Artistry, yes, artistry!

"Drawing must be as fine as the scratch of a nail. One can still have common ideas on that subject. But colours—everyone sees them his own way. A picture may be painted in any given tone.

"One must be able to work long at one composition without making one's labour conspicuous."

Serov's exacting attitude towards himself is shown in strong relief. Strict towards others, Serov never spared his own work. When speaking of colour, which so delighted him in the work of other artists, he seemed to completely underestimate his own gift for colour, as well as his wide experience and knowledge of the material.

Unceasing work without sparing oneself and trying one's talent in different directions, this was the purpose of the artist's life as Serov saw it.

Speaking of his conversations with Serov, N. Ulyanov points out that his teacher had one basic criterion for the evaluation of a work of art:

"To speak of art isolated from life was to him meaningless. For him, the work of an artist could be considered only when it was closely related to life; when this was evident in an artist under discussion, Serov became animated, his clouded features brightening. This was the real Serov known only to very few of his intimates. Wholesomeness, above

¹ For an article about V. Serov see *Soviet Literature* No. 10, 1946.

all wholesomeness is necessary for the artist, it is just as important as talent." That perhaps explains Serov's admiration for Titian and Tintoretto. He would become again aloof and gloomy while listening to the praise of many artists who, although faultless in some respects, lacked the most essential qualities: vitality and virility.

The author has devoted a special chapter to Serov's mastery as a portrait painter. He tells how critically the artist treated his own work during the painting of a portrait; Serov spared neither himself nor his sitters to achieve the embodiment of his idea. He sometimes demanded as many as a hundred sittings for a single portrait. He would abandon the work, begin afresh, at times even destroy his work only to improve it later.

The relations between Serov and his sitters are described in detail. Serov was a convinced realist and man of high moral principles who never flattered his sitters.

"I don't think any of the Russian portrait painters," writes Ulyanov, "neither Perov, Kramskoy or Repin ever placed themselves in such a strange position by waging a kind of constant warfare against the people whose portraits they painted." The author explains that Serov's frequently hostile attitude towards his clients was founded on a deep, smouldering hatred of philistinism.

The last years of his life Serov was particularly exacting towards himself and his art. "Serov was tireless in his quest of honesty in people and art, which should place greater obligations upon the artist and society. A man of uncompromising character, he had no outlet for his pent-up emotions. From day to day Serov became more severe and dissatisfied with himself, his environment and the art of his time."

In conclusion Ulyanov gives us the image of Serov as his contemporaries—his friends and intimates—remembered him. He concludes his memoirs with the words:

"This 'uncomfortable' Serov with his constant demands towards himself and others, had a strong sense of right and to the end of his days he guarded it jealously, fanatically.

"One often felt a silent reproach in Serov. A keen but passive observer, his very presence could be discouraging or encouraging. But once his self-respect as a man or artist

was encroached upon, all passivity fled—Serov became a fearless man of action."

A NEW TRANSLATION OF CHAUCER

Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Canterbury Tales*. State Literary Publishing House, Moscow, 508 pages.

The publication of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is undoubtedly a major event in the Soviet literary world.

The Russian reader's knowledge of Chaucer was formerly confined to fragments of the *Tales* translated at the end of the last century, which cannot be regarded as adequate either philologically or poetically.

The present edition (translation by Ivan Kashkin and Osip Rumer) is distinguished from earlier editions by its completeness, artistry and scrupulous fidelity to the original.

Without resorting to archaisms, the translators have preserved the individuality of Chaucer's language; the Russian translation reads naturally and smoothly and conveys the genuine spirit of the original.

The translation of the *Tales* has been supplemented by ample historical, cultural and literary notes and an essay on Chaucer's language.

An introductory article written by one of the translators, Ivan Kashkin, deals with Chaucer's epoch, the personality of the poet and his place in the history of English literature.

Kashkin dwells on the democratic humanism of Chaucer, which is still fresh and warm today.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, writes Kashkin, Chaucer sings, as it were, a farewell to feudal England in which, with unconcealed regret, he mourns the noble spirits of the past. He was also the first to address the people of the new era, yet he did not hesitate to openly censure their weaknesses and vices.

It is noteworthy that Chaucer, as one of the founders of European realism, unfailingly attracts the attention of Soviet scholars in their researches. Recent works of interest include Professor Alexei Jivilegov's chapter on Chaucer in the *History of English Literature*, published by the Academy of Sciences.



Engraving by F. Constantinov
for *Canterbury Tales*

es, also an article entitled *The Realism and Humanism of Chaucer* by Alexander Nikst in the second volume of the *Transactions* of the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages.

Connoisseurs of the woodcut will appreciate the interesting illustrations by Fyodor Constantinov.



Engraving by F. Constantinov for
Canterbury Tales

PUBLICATIONS OF SOVIET MUSEUMS

A Soviet museum is more than a treasure house of art. It is a vital centre for art education and the development of esthetics. An important aspect of its educational work is its publications, books on the history of art, exhibition catalogues, reproductions of paintings, sculptures and drawings. Special publishing houses have been set up for this purpose for the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Hermitage in Leningrad and the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. A number of works recently published by these institutions deal with Russian, Western and Eastern art of various epochs.

A catalogue of the works of Constantine Yuon, People's Artist of the R.S.F.S.R., was published recently by the Tretyakov Gallery on the occasion of his fiftieth year as painter. The preface, written by A. Zamoshkin, Director of the Gallery, describes the creative evolution of the artist whose role is prominent in the history of Russian art. To quote the author, "he was one of the first to perceive the beauty of the old Russian cities, with their grand monuments of medieval architecture, and the native beauty of the Russian provinces. This was indeed Constantine Yuon's discovery."

Finding that Yuon's impressions of life and nature are akin to the creative principles of the great Russian writers Chekhov and Dorky, Zamoshkin discusses his paintings group by group, the *Winter* scenes, the old Russian cities, numerous paintings of Moscow old and new, a series of works on the Russian provinces and, finally, his canvases of the Patriotic War. The catalogue lists 107 paint-

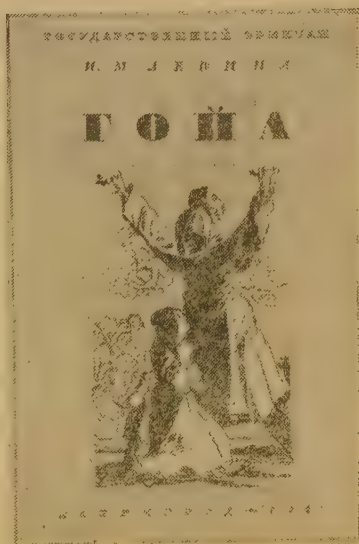
ings and 53 drawings as well as the artist's numerous contributions to the theatre and the cinema. It is illustrated with 12 reproductions.

The publishing house of the Leningrad Hermitage Museum recently produced a monograph on Francisco Goya by I. Levina. The book opens with a brief description of Spanish life and art on the threshold of the 19th century. The author then submits such information on the youth of Goya as may be gleaned from his early biographers Carderera, Materona and Yriarte. She emphasizes the influence of Tiepolo on Goya's early frescoes for the Saragossa churches. This is followed by the data on Goya's designs for the royal manufactory of Santa Barbara.

Referring to Goya's canvases on national festivities and ceremonies (*Feast of Sang Isidoro*, *Burial of a Sardinian*), the author notes the painter's increasingly critical attitude to life. This is due to the French Revolution of 1789 which had great repercussions in the social life of Spain at the time. A series of misfortunes culminating in grave nervous disorders coloured such of his works as *Madhouse in Saragossa*, *Tribunal of the Inquisition* and *Procession of the Flagellants*, painted in the final decade of the 18th century. "These works," remarks the author, "reveal quite another Goya whose faculties of perception are undimmed, but who perceives life as the tragedy of a suffering, sorely shaken human being."

A special section of the monograph is devoted to an analysis of Goya's portraits.

An entire chapter deals with the famous *Caprichos*, a series of allegories in black-and-white. I. Levina here strives to unfold the satiric meaning of these etchings and their bearing upon society. The subsequent chapters give an analysis of the great master's later graphic works and paintings.



Cover for monograph on Goya.

I. Levina concludes with a commentary on the artistic heritage left by Goya, on his continuators and imitators.

The monograph is illustrated with 50 reproductions of paintings and etchings, most of them admirably executed.

* * *

The newly founded publishing house of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts recently released I. Losev's book, *Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*.

This work is comprised of essays on the development of art in Mesopotamia from the end of the 5th Millennium B. C. up to the 7th century. The chapter titles are: *History of Discovery, Elam, Sumeria, Akkadia, Mari, Babylon of Hammurabi, Assyria, The New Babylon*. Based on extensive research and written in a clear and precise style, this book is undoubtedly the first comprehensive work in the Russian language on the history of ancient Mesopotamian art and ably covers this uncharted domain in Soviet art literature.

RUSSIAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL RELATIONS

Research Bulletin of the Leningrad University, No. 8, 1946. Leningrad. 46 pages.

The eighth issue of the *Research Bulletin* of Leningrad University is devoted to Russian-American cultural relations and certain problems of American culture.

In his paper *Russia and the American Revolution*, Docent R. Makogonenko dwells on the reaction to the American War of Independence in the Russian press at the end of the 18th century. The author notes the interest in American events evinced by the prominent Russian educator Nikolai Novikov,

publisher of the newspaper *Moskovskie Vedomosti* (Moscow Chronicles).

The diplomatic aspect of Russian-American relations from 1805 to 1812 is the theme of the next paper, *On Russian-American Relations at the Beginning of the 19th Century*, in which the author, Professor S. Okun, characterizes the position of Alexander I towards Russian-American trade and political collaboration.

Material for research on the history of Russian-American relations is extensive stresses Professor M. Alexeyev, who contributes two papers. He urges that investigation of the wealth of data be undertaken by both Soviet and American scholars.

Professor Alexeyev's first paper is about Alexei Evstalyev, Russian Consul in Boston and New York from 1809 to 1847, a prolific man of letters and one of the first advocates of Russian-American cultural relations.

In his second report, Professor Alexeyev deals with Longfellow's anthology of poems on Russia (vol. 20 of *Poems of Places*). The author quotes little known reminiscences of the Russian traveller Arsenyev who visited Longfellow in 1877, and also quotes Arsenyev's conversation with the poet on Russia.

Other articles include a review on contemporary American linguistics by Professor V. Yartseva, a paper by Professor B. Ilyish on the problem of the American language, a review by Docent V. Zhigadlo entitled *The Teaching of Foreign Languages in the U.S.A.*, and *Musical Culture in the U.S.A.*, by Professor S. Ginsburg.

Summaries of papers read at the scientific session of Leningrad University have also been published in the *Bulletin*. Of those not included in the *Bulletin*, worthy of mention are M. Alexeyev's *The Study of American Literature in the U.S.S.R.* and L. Trauberg's *The American Cinema*.

LITERATURE

NEKRASOV MUSEUM

"In this house the Russian poet, Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1878) lived and worked during twenty years of his life." So runs the inscription on a memorial tablet affixed to the facade of a house in Leningrad on the corner of Nekrasov Street and Liteiny Prospekt.

In the autumn of this year, the second floor which had housed the poet's private apartment and the office of the *Souremennik* (Contemporary) magazine was invaded by an army of workmen. The building had suffered considerably during the war but was repaired and made ready for opening as a museum bearing the poet's name.

Staff workers of the Academy of Sciences Institute of Literature searched long and diligently in letters, memoirs and old albums for references to, and descriptions of the Nekrasov house on the corner of Liteiny Prospekt; pictures, reproductions and engravings of the period were studied and compared until gradually there emerged from the miscellany a picture of the poet's apartment, as it looked during his lifetime. Meanwhile the papering was carefully peeled off from the walls, layer by layer, to find what remained of the pattern that had originally covered them. At long last some fragments appeared, pasted on shreds of the magazine *Golos* (Voice) for 1867—a discovery which was a great help in further restoration work.

Especial care is being given to setting up the editorial office and the poet's bedroom where he died in 1877. In the other rooms will be seen all the arrangements connected with the literary and public activities of Nekrasov himself and of his associates, Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Nikolai Dobrolyudov.

IN THE UNION OF SOVIET WRITERS

Through its Foreign Commission the Union of Soviet Writers maintains contact with the writers of other countries and acquaints its members with literary life beyond the borders of Russia.

The Commission has now under the guidance of its new Chairman, Constantine Simonov, considerably extended its activities; a number of new sections, American, English, French and Slav have been organized with some of our leading writers and critics—Leonid Sobolev, Vera Inber, Samuil Marshak, Alexander Leites, Ivan Kashkin, Vladimir Ermilov, Abel Startsev, Alexander Isbach, Boris Pesis, Isaac Zvavich, and others joining in energetic collaboration. On the programme

of the Committee some interesting papers bearing on literary life abroad and separate questions of foreign literature are scheduled for the near future; the first two papers are to be devoted to France.

One day not so long ago, a visitor chancing to enter the Large Hall of the Writers' Club could not have failed to notice that the audience filling its seats was different from that which usually attended its assemblies. There were many unfamiliar faces of aged, bearded men, many of whom had Orders of Labour glittering on the lapels of their coats.

On a small table beside the Chairman's seat surrounded by chrysanthemums stood a portrait of a man of advanced years with a handsome, manly face; even the glasses he wears are powerless to dim the fiery expression of his eyes. He is Sergei Alliluyev, one of the oldest of the Russian Bolsheviks (1866-1945), and the meeting has been called for a reading and discussion of his book of reminiscences which recently appeared under the title of *The Traversed Road*, with a preface by Mikhail Kalinin. The new faces among the audience are those of the friends and associates of the dead man who have assembled here to do honour to his memory.

The opening address is made by his daughter, Anna Alliluyeva, the author of a book of *Memoires* which appeared in print recently; and as she speaks, the simple restrained tones of her narrative bring before our eyes the image of a passionate, cheerful and tenacious man who never lost heart and who throughout a long life worked for the freedom and happiness of the workers.

Sprung from serf-peasants, one of a large family of children, Sergei Alliluyev from his earliest years experienced the evils of social injustice and wearing toil. He was sent to work from the age of ten. In his early youth he found himself in the Caucasus where he soon got employment in a railway shop at Tiflis. He eventually joined the revolutionary movement in the Caucasus and became one of its prominent members. From then on he gave up his whole life to the cause of the Revolution.

Dmitri Orlov, the actor, read some excerpts from Alliluyev's book. The pages seemed to exhale the atmosphere of the early years of revolutionary struggle. We heard of Alliluyev's meetings with prominent figures in the movement—the young Stalin; the Georgian revolutionary, Lado Ketzhoveli, treacherously killed in prison; Leonid Krassin; the youth, Maxim Gorky. We heard of the first revolutionary newspaper in the Caucasus, the first illegal May day celebrations. "Russian workers," Kalinin writes in the preface,

will find in the book the history of their class."

In the discussion following the reading parallels were drawn between Sergei Alliluyev's *The Traversed Road* and his daughter's *Memoirs*, the general opinion being that the two books supplement each other.

"Reading these pages," said Mdivani, the playwright, "one begins to understand why a generation of Soviet youth proved so staunch in their grim struggle with the fascists. What men they had for their teachers! The appearance of books of this kind will no doubt play an important educational role in the future."

MUSIC

MOSCOW CONCERT SEASON

The Moscow musical season is in full swing—a fact announced by many inviting placards and playbills posted throughout the city. In the Large Hall of the Moscow Conservatory the season opened with a programme of Russian music, the symphonic orchestra of the U.S.S.R. conducted by Constantine Ivanov playing Chaikovsky's *Fifth Symphony* and Glazunov's *Fifth Symphony*. The Second Symphonic Concert gave a programme of modern Soviet music—Nikolai Myaskovsky's *Twenty-First Symphony* and Dmitri Shostakovich's *Seventh Symphony*, the latter work born in besieged Leningrad.

The new Chaikovsky Concert Hall on Mayakovsky Square, designed by Dmitri Chuchulin, was built shortly before the outbreak of the war. The best musicians of Moscow, and other towns of the Soviet Union, preeminently non-Russian ensembles, give concerts in the Hall. There are daily musical programmes in the Hall of Columns—the oldest concert hall in the capital, among them public concerts by the Radio Committee of the U.S.S.R. which are broadcast throughout the land. These entertainments, in contrast to the severely academic programmes of the Conservatory, include readings, recitations, dancing and music. Other interesting and varied concerts are frequently held at the House of Scientists, while there are the Chamber Concerts at the Small Hall of the Conservatory.

This is far from a complete list of Moscow's concerts. There are clubs and Houses of Culture belonging to every large-sized factory, where—for a very low price or even gratis—Moscow citizens can enjoy a concert or a play. There are clubs attached to trade and public organizations; architects find repose and good music in the House of the Architect; Moscow writers have their own club; theatrical people spend pleasant evenings at the House of the Actor, or the Central House of Workers in Art; Moscow automobile people have a magnificent Palace of Culture at the Stalin Works; railwaymen have a Central House of Culture as have also the workers of the Moscow Underground; and schoolchildren have their Houses of Pioneers. Music figures prominently in the work of all these clubs and cultural bodies.

A great number of special concerts embracing extensive fields of musical culture have

been inaugurated, with season tickets giving admission to an entire cycle or series of such concerts. The popularity of these season tickets is evidence of the tremendous interest in music among the masses. Particularly interesting is a cycle of Russian symphonic music which opened with a programme of the works of Mikhail Glinka, the founder of the Russian school of music. In the "Western Music" series the works of the giants of the West-European music—Bach and Beethoven—will be played.

An original and pleasing development is a "Musical University" for people whose interests extend to questions of the history of music, contemporary trends in music and the works of modern musicians. These concert-lectures are held in the House of Scientists; the programmes carry the audiences into the heart of world music history—and the lecture or critical discourse is illustrated by the performance of the musical works examined.

Moscow does not stand alone in these activities, music lectures of the same type having recently been organized at Petrozavodsk capital of the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Republic; Leningrad musicologists are in charge of the talks and lectures, and the illustrations are given by artists of the Leningrad Philharmonic, the Leningrad Conservatory and the Leningrad Academic Theatres. Another musical lecture organization has been in existence for over a year now at Nikolayev, a shipbuilding town on the Dnieper which suffered a long period of Hitlerite occupation. Last season's repertoires contained thirty-five concert-lectures on Russian music and concert tours were arranged at the Andriy Marty shipbuilding works. On this season's programmes is a series of concert-lectures on the life and works of Ukrainian composers.

GAVRIL POPOV'S THIRD SYMPHONY

Gavriil Popov has finished his *Third Symphony*, a work dedicated to the heroic struggle put up by the Spanish people against the dark powers of fascist reaction. Spanish folk themes have been largely used; running through the *Scherzo* movement is one of the melodies recorded by Mikhail Glinka during his stay in Spain in the middle of the 19th century.

In the *Finale* the coming triumph of the Spanish democratic forces is revealed vividly.

A CHORUS OF 125,000 SCHOOLCHILDREN

In Leningrad, a town chorus of a hundred and twenty-five thousand schoolchildren is being formed. The songs are practised in the schools and pioneer units whose choirs will later be fused in one immense ensemble. School and Pioneer organizations are actively helping in the work.

CHAIKOVSKY M.S.S. DISCOVERED

E. Zabolotski, a young conductor, recently came upon a quantity of waste music paper on one of the Leningrad markets and in on

of the rolls discovered a thin book of music manuscript. On the cover was written: "St. Petersburg Conservatory, in memory of the concert of March 7, 1892. P. Chaikovsky, *Suite from Ballet*."

Now it is a well-known fact that on March 7, 1892, *The Suite* from Chaikovsky's *Nutcracker* Ballet was performed for the first time under the author's baton at the Ninth Symphonic Assembly of the Russian Musical Society. *The Suite* was published the same year but the M.S.S. disappeared, and until the curious accident here narrated, was considered as lost.

Some other Chaikovsky manuscripts have recently been discovered—that of the libretto to the *Symphony of Manfred* and fifteen letters written by the composer to V. Pogozhev, Manager of the Imperial Theatres at Petersburg.

The M.S.S. and letters have been handed over to the Chaikovsky Museum at Klin.

THEATRE

VAKHTANGOV JUBILEE

Time—the spring of 1911; place—the study of Nemirovich-Danchenko, Director of the Moscow Art Theatre. Enter a young man, swift, impulsive, spare of figure, with large, observant eyes.

"Take a seat, please," says the director. "Well, what is it that you would like to get from us; and what can you give us?"

"I want to get all I can and to give . . . oh . . . I've never thought about that."

"What exactly do you want?"

"To learn to work as a producer."

"Have you been interested in the stage long?"

"Ever since I can remember."

The young man was Evgeni Vakhtangov.

His name is closely connected with the history of the Soviet theatre. November, 1946, will see the twentieth anniversary of the Vakhtangov Theatre.

The theatre developed from a dramatic studio founded shortly before World War I by a group of Moscow students, under the direction of Evgeni Vakhtangov, an actor of the Art Theatre and pupil and follower of Constantine Stanislavsky.

In 1921, the Vakhtangov Studio, sponsored by the Art Theatre, staged the *Miracle of St. Antonio*. Freed from all elements of mysticism, Maurice Maeterlinck's play was presented as a caustic satire on bigotry and philistinism.

But it was with the performance of *Princess Turandot* by Carlo Gozzi in the spring of 1922, that the Studio may be said to have come into its own. Here the ideas of Vakhtangov—his strivings to purge the stage of vulgarity and cheap estheticism—were fully realized. The performance was a triumph for the young theatre. But the man responsible for it was not there to share the pleasure of the audience. He was at home, lying grievously ill, doomed to death. One of the entr'actes was an exceptionally long one, but nobody showed signs of impatience. They all knew that Stanislavsky himself had hurried to

the sick man's bedside to offer him his congratulations in person, to tell him of the play's immense success and shake hands on it. *Princess Turandot* was Vakhtangov's swan song. He died a few weeks later, in May, 1922.

The young theatre, developed from the Studio in 1926, henceforth to be known by the name of its founder, grew to be one of the best theatres in the capital, giving splendid interpretations of the Russian and world classical repertoire. Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, an invariable favourite with the public, ran through some six hundred performances; of the successful Gorky productions mention must be made of *Egor Bulychev*, with the title role in the hands of Boris Shchukin, a brilliant actor who came to the Vakhtangov Theatre in 1919 straight from the front of the Civil War. He particularly endeared himself to the Soviet public by the images of Lenin he created in *The Man With the Gun*, and in two films, *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918*.

The Vakhtangov Theatre always has in its repertoire plays dealing with Soviet themes and people. Lidia Seifullina's *Virinya*, the first Soviet realistic production, was put on as early as 1924, and was followed later by many other plays from the pens of Soviet authors—*The Badgers* (Barsouki) by Leonid Leonov; *The Break-Up* by Boris Lavrenyov; *The Intervention* by Lev Slavin; *Tempo*, *The Aristocrats* and *The Man With the Gun* by Nikolai Pogodin; Vladimir Solovyov's *Field-Marshal Kutuzov*, and Alexander Korneichuk's *Front*.

The core of the theatre's personnel is its old guard, the old Vakhtangovites, pupils and friends of the man who created it: Ruben Simonov, Boris Zakhava, Anatoli Goryunov, Cecilia Mansourova, Anna Orochko . . . Consummate masters of their art and known throughout the country; they are teachers, counsellors and friends to the actors of the younger generation. Attached to the theatre is a school from which fresh young forces are continuously recruited.

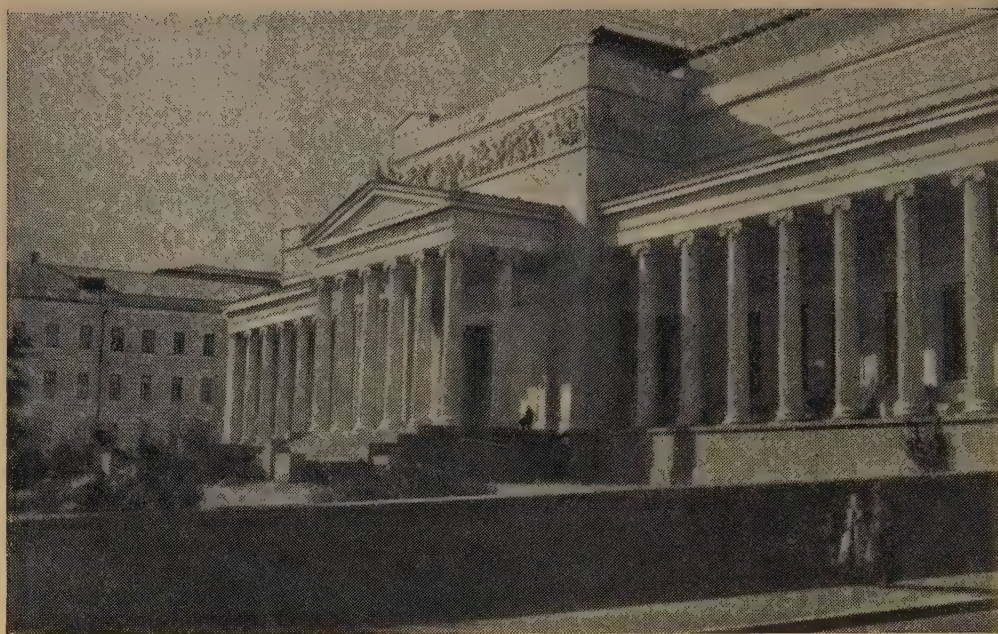
ELEVEN STRANGERS

That is the name of the new production at the Moscow Operetta Theatre. The heroes are sportsmen; both personages and theme are decidedly outside the bounds of the usual operetta cliché. Last year, it will be remembered, Soviet sportsmen scored some big successes abroad. They showed up brilliantly on the football grounds of Britain, on the stadiums of France, the ice ways of Norway and skating rinks of Finland.

Eleven Strangers shows the visit of Soviet football players to England. . . The Russian team is seen arriving at the homeland of football. Many people feel sure that the visit will end in defeat.

"Russians coming to a country where there are players like me! They might just as well not unpack their bags," says Stanley McPlute, known as the Napoleon of British football, in a talk with the reporters.

The match begins. The Soviet players win. The scene on the stage shows what happened in actual fact. There is a scene in Act II,



The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

where Betty Stenwick, a sprightly English journalist, interviews the Moscow players.

"Mr. Komarov," she says, addressing the Captain of the Soviet team, "tell us how you scored that last goal. . . ."

"Oh," answers the Captain, "that was thanks to Kuznetsov's dribbling. He can give you the details."

Betty Stenwick goes up to Kuznetsov. "Mr. Kuznetsov, will you tell us how the last goal was scored?"

"The ball was cleverly passed by my brother Senya," says Kuznetsov. "You can get all the particulars from him."

The journalist goes from one player to another; until at last the captain explains the situation:

"One for all, and all for one," he says. "That's our motto!"

The strength of the Soviet man lies in friendship and unity. That is the secret of victory. The idea is brought out in the production by the regisseur, Fyodor Kaverin. The performance is a great success with an audience among whom are as many inveterate theatre-goers as there are passionate football fans.

A R T

OPENING OF MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow has been closed for a period of over five years. Fully aware of what might be expected of the German fascists, the museum's staff saw to it that the treasures entrusted into their charge were safely evacuated into the interior of the country. The museum building did suffer somewhat during the bombing, but reconstruction has now been completed; the decorative moulding, the paintings

on walls and ceilings are restored, and all the sections of the museum except the Oriental Department, which will be ready later, have been opened to the public once more.

The history of the Pushkin Museum dates back to the beginning of the last century. In the artistic salon of Zinaida Volkonsky, where the poets Pushkin, Odoyevski, and Venevitinov, and the painter Bryullov, and others were frequent visitors, a "Design for an Esthetic Museum at Moscow," only lately discovered, was drafted as early as 1831. It contained, in part, the following passage: "It is to be desired that the fine arts be included within the field of public education, and conduce to the formation of esthetic appreciation amongst the people." It was long, however, before the idea was finally put into effect. In the fifties of the nineteenth century a "Section of Fine Arts" was set up at the Moscow University, a single room where a small collection of plaster casts and of coins was on view. It was not till the year 1912 that the present building of the museum was erected by Academician R. Klein with funds donated by the inhabitants of Moscow. In the beginning its scope was narrow; the museum being used for exhibiting the collections of the Moscow University, those of the famous egyptologist, Golenishchev, and of a number of other private collectors. Not until after the October Revolution were specimens of graphic and plastic arts ranging from works of the classical period to those of the middle of the nineteenth century included in the exposition. A large picture gallery was founded, a rich section of engravings, a publishing office, a restoration and a number of other auxiliary workshops. From a modest collection intended for purely educational purposes the mu-

um has become a repository of rare and valuable objects of art.

In the first six halls, monuments of ancient art, the sculptures of the Greeks and Romans are represented mainly by casts, a study of which will enable the visitor to trace the history of ancient plastic art right up to the fall of the Roman Empire. In the Greek halls are the works of the great sculptors of antiquity, Mironus, Polyclethus, Phidias, Scopas, Lysippus. There are casts of sculptural groups which in long past ages served as ornaments to the Temple of Athene on the Island of Aegina; of Zeus, in Olympia and of the famous Parthenon. The department of antiques brings us up to the works of the Hellenic epoch (3rd—1st centuries B.C.) and specimens of the Roman portrait. Among the originals—mostly vases—are a decorated amphora bearing a design by Polygnotus, the greatest of the old Greek painters; some samples of South Italian applied art (3rd and 4th centuries B.C.) and several sculptures of the same period, the most remarkable being a head and torso of Aphrodite (3rd century B.C.)

The picture gallery of the museum opens with three halls devoted to Italian art of the 13th-18th centuries. In the first we see works mainly of a religious nature: the Pisa Madonna of the 13th century—paintings by the Trecento masters (13th century) in which traits of a realistic conception break through the rigours of icon painting canons; canvases by masters of the early Renaissance (15th century)—Pietro Perugino, Francesco Francia, Cima da Conegliano and others.

The gem of this collection is *The Annunciation*, a small masterpiece by Sandro Botticelli.

In the next hall of the Italian school (16th to early 17th century) are paintings by Sebastiano del Piombo, Giulio Romano, Paolo Veronese and other artists of the Renaissance.

The art lover who wishes to acquaint himself with Italian sculpture of the 15th to the 16th centuries will visit the "Italian Court"; a replica of the inner court of the Bargello palace at Florence where he can admire casts of the works of Michelangelo, Donatello and Andrea Verrocchio.

A part of the Second Italian Hall is occupied by the works of Spanish masters: Luis de Morales, Francisco Zurbaran, Esteban Murillo, and Jusepe Ribera, of the Diego Velazquez school. A recently acquired *Portrait of Vasquez* by El Greco—an admirable specimen of the artist's work in that genre, is on view for the first time.

In the Third Italian Hall are hung paintings in the barocco and rococo styles (17th-18th centuries), among them works from the brush of that brilliant colourist, Domenico Feti; canvases by the gloomy visionary, Salvator Rosa, and Pietro da Cortona and Luca Giordano, representatives of the decorative barocco style of the period.

The efflorescence of the 18th century Venetian art is enshrined in the masterly canvases of Giambattista Tiepolo; the landscape fantasies of Francesco Guardi and some piquantly effective canvases from the brush of Pietro Longhi on masquerade themes.

In the Netherlands Hall are collected specimens of North-European art of the 15th

to the early 17th centuries, among them several paintings of the German school (Lucas Cranach), some pictures of the early Netherlands school (Joos van Cleve, Jan Gossaert and others), and numerous pictures of Bartolomeo Spranger, Antonis Moor, and Pieter Brueghel.

The 17th century Dutch school is generously represented by illustrious names of every period and genre of the Dutch school in its glory; the landscape painters Avercamp, Jan van Goyen; Solomon van Ruijsdael; Jacob van Ruijsdael; the genre painters, Nicolaes Berchem, Paulus Potter, Aelbert Cuyp, Gerard Terborch, Gabriel Metsu, Adriaen van Ostade, Caspar Netscher; the master of still life, Pieter Claesz, Willem Kalf, Willem Heda, and others. The place of honour in the Dutch Hall is occupied by rights by the canvases of the great Rembrandt, of the six pictures from his brush in the possession of the museum—the greatest, perhaps, is *Abazuerno, Haman and Esther*, a work of his later period.

Eight paintings, among them the *Bacchanalia* by Peter Paulus Rubens have a hall to themselves. The pictures of Rubens' pupils—the portrait painter, Anthonis van Dyck; the singer of popular carousals, Jacob Jordaens; the author of still life pictures Frans Snyder, as well as genre canvases by Adriaen Brouwer and David Teniers are hung in the Flemish Hall.

English art of the 18th to the beginning of the 19th century is represented mainly by portraits by Peter Lely, John Opie, John Hoppner, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Sir Thomas Lawrence. The *View of Highgate* by John Constable, one of the greatest masters of the al fresco genre speaks volumes for the beauty of English landscape painting. The exposition concludes with the three halls of French Art of the 17th-19th centuries, the father of classicism in French painting of the 17th century, the famous Nicolas Poussin being well represented.

The art of Louis XIV's time is illustrated by portraits by Charles Le Brun, Hyacinthe Rigaud, and Nicolas Largillière. The rococo style is represented in a large collection of canvases by Antoine Watteau, François Boucher and others.

In the last hall—No. 18, are hung the works of French masters of the 18th to the first half of the 19th century. What first arrests our attention here is the new form of classicism born of the epoch of the revolution of 1789, and imprinted in the canvases of Jacques-Louis David, Jean-August-Dominique Ingres and Pierre Prud'hon.

The romantic trend in French art in the 19th century is represented by the paintings of Eugene Delacroix and Théodore Gericault—and the realistic school has its exponents in the pictures of Jean-François Millet and Gustave Courbet. The art of Camille Corot, the great landscape painter, and of the masters of what is known as the Barbizon school—Theodore Rousseau, Jules Dupré, Constans Troyon, Charles François Daubigny—is well represented.

The whole collection at the disposal of the museum could not be accommodated in the halls for lack of space. The premises are to

be considerably extended within the next few years.

The official opening ceremony at the beginning of October was attended by a large number of guests, art workers, scientists and the general public.

ARTISTS AT WORK

PYOTR VASSILIEV

At a modest exhibition held some twenty-five years ago by the Odessa Institute of Art, attention was drawn to a series of pencil-portraits of Lenin, made by a young student of the Institute, Pyotr Vassiliev by name.

The quarter of a century that has passed the artist has devoted to work on the image of the founder of the Soviet state, some thousands of pencil portraits and sixteen paintings of Lenin being the result of his labours.

The portraits are expressive and life-like, and hardly a day passes that the artist does not make a new sketch or two in search of new traits and expressions in the image of Lenin.

Vassiliev has produced several series of monochrome crayon portraits of Lenin, a selection from which has been published in four albums. The last one, which appeared just before the war, contains portraits of Lenin and Stalin.

At the time of writing Vassiliev is at work on a large painting representing Lenin and Stalin.

PYOTR KOTOV

During World War I a group of students of the St. Petersburg Academy of Art was sent out to the Russian-German front. The young artists made sketches, studies and pictures recording life at the front. Among them was Pyotr Kotov, then a promising young painter. His first picture was *A Letter From Home in the Trenches*. For this and another painting made shortly after, called *Gathering for the Hunt* he was awarded a scholarship including a trip abroad.

Since the October Revolution Kotov has devoted his brush entirely to themes of Socialist construction. He travels all over the country, visiting the building sites in the Urals, at Kuznetskstroy, Magnitostroy, Sormovo, Stalingrad, the Donets Basin, Central Asia; he conveys new impressions in canvases like *General View of Magnitogorsk*, *Blast Furnace No. 1 at Kuznetskstroy and Red Sormovo*. To him we owe some important compositions recording episodes of the Russian Revolution made in the years 1931-1934, *Red Presnya in 1905*, *Execution of Workers in Trekhgorka Factory*, *Death of Chapayev*.

During the years of World War II, he painted portraits of great artistic merit including those of Academicians Leon Orbeli, Nikolai Burdenko, and of collective farmer Ferapont Golovaty (who bought a fighting plane with his own savings), all of which have been hung in the State Tretyakov Gallery. *Victory Parade*, the picture Kotov is now engaged on is intended for the Art Exhibition of the U.S.S.R., to be held in honour of the 30th Anniversary of the October Revolution.

EVGENI LANCERET

Soviet art has suffered a severe loss in the death of Evgeni Lanceret. The venerable septuagenarian artist died brush in hand, putting the finishing touches to the decorative design of the vestibule of Kazan railway station in Moscow. Two large frescoes, *Victory* and *Peace* are his last contribution to Soviet art. In the former, *Victory* is personified in the manly figure of a youth in full fighting equipment. *Peace* is the tranquil figure of a mother with an infant in her arms.

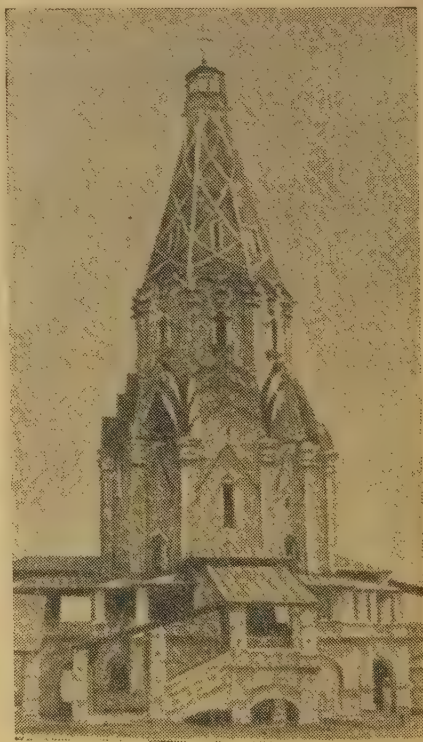
His art was versatile and wide in range—monumental designs, landscapes, portraits, still life, theatrical scenery, book illustrations all being included in the wide sweep of his talent. Every one of his works throbs with a keen sense of real life. A series of his paintings bearing the name of *Trophies of Russian Arms* speak eloquently of Red Army victories won in the titanic struggle of World War II.

MISCELLANEOUS

THE VILLAGE OF KOLOMENSKOYE

Not far from Moscow lies the village of Kolomenskoye, for six hundred years a country seat of the tsars of Russia.

Day and night soldiers stood on guard on the high watchtowers of the ancient Russian town of Kolomna. They peered into the distance, looking for a conflagration or for clouds of dust rising over the road. When the



The Church of the Ascension in the village of Kolomenskoye, built in 1532



Evgeni Lanceret

By G. Vereisky

*The Good-Fare Hall in
Kolomenskoye*



clang of the tocsin announced the approach of the Tartar hordes of Batu-Khan, many of the inhabitants of Kolomna took sail up the River Moscow and settled on one of its high banks. This, according to legend is the way the village of Kolomenskoye was founded in 1237.

From whatever direction the visitor approaches that picturesque spot, his attention is attracted by the Church of the Ascension, standing high up on the river bank. It was built in the year 1532, by order of Vassili III, Grand Prince of Muscovy, but the name of the architect has not been preserved in the records. Although built in stone, the architecture of the church follows the old Russian style of timber building—the light cupolas, the raised thresholds of the porches and other characteristic details. In a niche at the eastern end of the gallery is the Tsar's seat, fashioned of stone: an armchair with the legs in the form of lion's paws—a convenient place from which to watch military parades or enjoy falconry!

Nearby are two more stone buildings. One of them, round in form, was once the belfry of the Church of the Ascension. It also dates back to the 16th century, and has walls of an extraordinary solidity—over six feet thick. The other building is the water tower, presumed by historians and archeologists to have been erected early in the 17th century. Its austere simplicity of form is of considerable architectural interest. Together with the water tower of the Moscow Kremlin it is one of the oldest monuments of the water supply system in Russia.

The main entrance to the royal estate was formed by a massive gate under a clock tower dating from the year 1672. The gate faces the River Moscow because in those days the road from the Capital lay along the river bank where the large village of Kolomenskoye stretched. On either side of the gates are various premises. To the right, are the old 17th-century government chancelleries, to the left, the regimental offices, the wine cellars, the Cooking and Vinegar Chambers, and the Good-Fare Hall at the corner, whose names alone tell us that these premises were all connected

with banquets on the Tsar's estate. The back gates resemble the main entrance but are without a clock tower; adjoining them is a portion of a 17th-century wall, the rest of which has long since crumbled away.

This is all that has survived of the old residence, but contemporary models and pictures tell us much about the buildings destroyed by time. Preserved in a large glass case is a model of the famous wooden Kolomna Timber Palace built between the years 1667 and 1670; the model was made in 1868, after designs dating from the 18th century. The palace was built by Russian craftsmen—carpenters, joiners, woodcarvers and painters, whose names have been preserved by history—S. Petrov, I. Mikhailov, S. Ushakov, B. Salтанov. . . The palace contained some 270 rooms with 3,000 windows and was decorated with carved and gilded wood.

Beside the native buildings in Kolomenskoye there are "guests" and strangers from different parts of the country; the little house of Peter I, brought here from Archangel (1702); the watchtower of the Nikolsk-Karélian Monastery, brought from the shores of the White Sea (1690); and a wooden mead distillery from the Preobrazhensk Palace near Moscow, dating from the latter end of the 17th century.

Kolomenskoye has many historical associations. In 1606, the rebel-peasants headed by Ivan Bolotnikov, pitched their camp here. The insurgents offered stubborn and heroic resistance to the troops of the tsar and the name of Bolotnikov is inscribed in the annals of the country. It was in Kolomenskoye too, that the principal events of the copper riots of 1662 took place.

The lovely scenery of the surrounding country forms a splendid setting for the venerable historical monuments. An extensive view of the river with the picturesque villages lying on its banks opens from the gallery of the Church of the Ascension; in the distance glimmer the smooth waters of the Southern Port, and the No. 10 sluices of the Moscow-Volga Canal are clearly visible. The delightful panorama is rounded off by vistas of distant villages.

Russian porcelain exhibition. A Coffee Service (1839)



EXHIBITION OF RUSSIAN CHINA

In the museum-estate of Kuskovo, one of the beauty spots in the vicinity of Moscow, an exhibition of Russian porcelain has been opened.

Behind the glass doors of cupboards, cabinets and show-cases in the large old-fashioned halls porcelain vases, sculptured figures, dishes, cups and plates sparkle with gold and shimmer for all the world like exquisite rainbow-hued flowers.

The manufacture of porcelain brought from China remained a closed secret to Europeans for many centuries. The initiator of porcelain manufacture in Russia was Dmitry Vinogradov, a metal worker, a scholar of parts, and a friend of Mikhail Lomonosov; to him also belongs the honour of discovering the secret of the composition of the porcelain and the manufacture of the first objects in the new medium.

One of the rarities at Kuskovo is a white cup in the shape of a little box with a lid to it, ornamented with a relief design of flowers and leaves, and bearing the mark of Vinogradov and the date—1748. This is the



Russian porcelain exhibition. The Bear Hunt (1934) by a Nenets student

earliest example of Russian porcelain that has come down to us. There is little, indeed, in that modest little cup to forecast the brilliance of workmanship that Russian porcelain was to achieve during the next two centuries.

Magnificent vases and dinner services, dainty statuettes—created in the second half of the 18th century by the skilled serf craftsmen of the time—are charming in the elegance of their lines, the delicacy of their finish and freshness of their colouring. The 19th century is represented by the exhibits of the former Imperial Works in Petersburg and the famous Russian factories of Popov, Gardner, Batenin and Safronov. Of great interest, also, are the pieces from the factory of Nikita Khrapunov, who was famous for small clever grotesques, and some statuettes by Peter Kozlov. The pieces manufactured by small peasant handicraft workshops in the Russian "lubok" style—gay, multicoloured and sprightly, are vividly reminiscent of popular open air fêtes, fairs and bazaars, where a brisk trade was carried on in cheap chinaware.

In the Soviet section by the side of household crockery—vases and small figures—we see some unique pieces by noted sculptors and artists who work in the magic clay. The Leningrad Porcelain Factory, now bearing the name of Lomonosov, is as famous as ever, while many outstanding masters are working at the Dulyov Works near Moscow. A number of the choicest specimens manufactured at these factories are now on view at the Kuskovo exposition.

Soviet porcelain is seeking new lines of development. In No. 6 of this magazine we acquainted our readers with some remarkable productions in Soviet china in recent years. The sculptor, Sergei Orlov, who works at the Dmitrovsk Factory, has been awarded a Stalin Prize for his *Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*—a masterpiece of dainty workmanship. The goldfish, high on the white frothing crest of a wave, is a joy to the eye—so gentle is the rhythm of line, so appealing the spare colour scheme—dark blue, white and gold. Another outstanding piece is the Victory vase, produced at the Lomonosov

*Trophy banners and the
Banner of Victory in the
Red Army Museum*



Works. It was brought from Leningrad as a present to Stalin and is now on view in one of the halls of the State Tretyakov Gallery—triumph of Soviet ceramic art.

EIGHTH CENTENARY OF MOSCOW

An exhibition dedicated to the forthcoming eight-hundredth anniversary of Moscow's foundation is open in the halls of the State Historical Library, where hundreds of books and periodicals are on view bearing on the history of the city from the first mention of it in the ancient chronicles.

There is some interesting literature on ancient Moscow when it was a homestead on the Kremlin hill surrounded by impassable forests and swamps; the books and documents tell how it was gradually converted into a fortress, then into the capital of a small principality (Kniazhestvo). Century succeeded century and Moscow grew into the Capital of the State of Muscovy, gathering around itself the mighty forces of Russia.

There is material telling of Moscow's part in the development of Russian culture, of the opening of Moscow University, the first in Russia; of the founding of the Bolshoi, Maly and Art theatres; of the library attached to the Rumyantsev Museum (now the State Lenin Library); of the Tretyakov Picture Gallery, and the Moscow Conservatory.

There are extensive selections of books and magazine articles and essays dealing with the life and activities in Moscow of men prominent in Russian art and letters—Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Tolstoy, Ostrovsky, Chekhov, Chaikovsky, Levitan, Sobinov, Tanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko. . . .

Another interesting exhibit consists of publications devoted to the reconstruction of

the Soviet capital, to Moscow during World War II . . . to the future Moscow . . . The Fourth Stalin Five-Year Plan will bring many changes to the city.

An exhaustive bibliography of books and periodicals bearing on Moscow's eight-hundred-years' record has been prepared: the card index of fifty-five thousand items reflects the course of the city's life during eight centuries.

The Section of Scientific Research at the Moscow Conservatory under the direction of Academician Boris Asafyev is contributing a large collection of material for the great occasion, entitled *Musical Moscow Past and Present*.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, dealing with the history of Moscow's musical life from the Middle Ages to our own days; the second, a discourse on musical style and the school of musical composition connected with the city. Part III contains miscellaneous information about Moscow as a musical centre, with items on concert and theatrical life, on Moscow musical people, performers and teachers and material dealing with musical societies and circles, music publishing houses, etc.

RED ARMY MUSEUM

One dark autumn night in 1944, a Soviet reconnaissance party led by Sergeant Sinitsin, penetrating far into the German rear in East Prussia, found their way to German headquarters and laid ambushes on the roads. One day, having waylaid a German staff lorry and securely bound their captives the soldiers began to search the lorry.

"Why, that's a Russian banner!" cried Sinitsin. And so it was—a great silken piece

with a St. George's Cross embroidered on it, and the words in Russian: "For Sevastopol, 1854-1855."

The historical flag now wrested from German hands had been presented to a certain regiment of the Russian Army for its heroic defence of Sevastopol in the Crimean War and had been preserved ever since in the museum of that town. And now, in the year 1944, as they retreated from Sevastopol, the Germans had carried the banner away with them. The Russian flag is back home once more on Russian land in the Moscow Museum of the Red Army.

Among the exhibits now on view in the Red Army Museum are many others with records no less interesting than the great silken banner of Sevastopol. Here, for example, is a sniper's rifle K-E 1729, which at the beginning of the war was in the hands of sniper Hussein Andrukhaev. He fell at Rostov and was posthumously invested with the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. The rifle was passed on to Ilyin, one of the best snipers on the Stalingrad front, who used it to account for 382 Germans, an exploit which won for him the gold star of Hero of the Soviet Union. At Belgorod, the rifle fell to sniper Gordienko whose gallant fighting earned for him, too, a Hero of the Soviet Union decoration. Over a thousand of Hitler's men is the total count to the credit of that glorious weapon.

Another relic is the disk of Signalman Matvei Putilov, a soldier who fought on the Stalingrad front. Mortally wounded, he fell on a broken telephone cable pressing the ends together with his teeth. Contact was set up, and the gallant fellow, though dead, continued to fulfil his assignment. A veteran gun, marked No. 4627 fired 5,050 rounds during a long fighting march from Livno to Prague. Many will linger regretfully at a show-case containing the personal belongings of the illustrious generals, Vatutin and Chernyakhovsky, who fell on the field of battle. A diorama showing the "Breaching of German Defences on the Oder" is a favourite with visitors to the Museum.

The last of the fifteen rooms containing the exhibits of the Great Patriotic War,

is the Hall of Banners. In a glass case, on a pedestal, and illuminated by floodlights is the fighting banner carried all the way to Berlin and hoisted by Soviet soldiers on the building of the Reichstag. Grouped around it are the colours of different Red Army units with the variegated ribbons of military Orders. Lying on the ground at the foot of the pedestal are fascist banners—among them Hitler's personal standard.

The number of exhibits of the Red Army Museum, many of which are unique, is continually growing: Staff workers of the Museum followed Soviet Army units through the campaigns, collecting and making shots as the went of anything they thought would prove of interest to the exhibition. The photo fund numbers some fifty thousand negatives; many of them showing Soviet writers, artists and actors amidst scenes of war and front-line life.

NINE THOUSAND LECTURES

If you think the crowd of people gathered around a brilliantly-lighted entrance and trying to get seats for the première of a favorite play, you will be mistaken. In the U.S.S.R. lectures and papers on scientific subjects are no less popular than theatre or talkies.

The Soviet Lecture Bureau was founded in Moscow in the autumn of 1943, in the very thick of war events. Academicians Evgen Tarle, Andrei Vyshinsky, Evgeni Varga addressed audiences on questions of topical social and political importance, and from the very first these lectures aroused the liveliest interest of Moscow audiences.

In the course of three years, the lecture sponsored by the Bureau have become traditional. As many as five hundred different themes have been covered. During the war years military specialists spoke about the situation on the fronts; now that peace has come the lectures are mostly devoted to questions of foreign politics, history, philosophy and economics.

Among the lecturers enrolled in the Bureau are 25 academicians, 26 corresponding members; 106 Doctors of Science and Professors;



New stamps

4 Bachelors of Science and docents; 36 generals, admirals, and colonels; 33 writers and journalists, and a number of people prominent in public and political life.

Nine thousand lectures attended by some three million people is the sum total of the Bureau's three years' work. Its lecturers have appeared on the platforms of every capital of the Soviet republics and in every large town from Brest to Vladivostok and from Archangel to Alma-Ata. Two hundred stenogrammes—five-and-a-half million copies in all—of the best of the lectures have been published for circulation.

SOVIET POSTAGE STAMPS

The first Soviet postage stamp was issued in the autumn of the year 1921. It bore the picture of a worker thrusting aside with his foot a killed dragon, an allegorical stamp which is now esteemed a great rarity.

Postage stamps are cultural monuments in miniature. The series of tiny coloured engravings bearing the words *Post of the U.S.S.R.* are a record of all the important events witnessed in the country throughout the last quarter of a century.

It is common knowledge that the first postage stamp appeared in England 106 years ago, Russia being the third country in the world to introduce postage stamps. The first stamp, one of ten-kopek value, appeared in this country in 1857; it was brown in colour, with a blue oval in the centre and bore the Russian state emblem with post horns below. The design of the postage stamp of tsarist Russia never varied in almost half a century of its existence; with the exception of four stamps of a series issued for a charity cause in the year 1905, representing the Moscow Kremlin, the monuments to Admiral Kornilov at Sevastopol, to the popular heroes, Minin and Pozharsky at Moscow, and to Peter I at Petersburg.

The stamps successively issued in Soviet years display a great variety of subject and design, reflecting the progress of culture and science, technology, art and the country's social life.

Soviet postage stamps are of two kinds—the standard type, printed in millions upon

millions of copies and the special stamps marking important events. It is no rare thing, however, for these latter, too, to reach an enormous circulation. Take, for example, the stamp issued in 1937 on the centenary of the death of Alexander Pushkin and printed in 18 million copies.

The effigy of Lenin is impressed in a number of issues, the best of which is, perhaps, the series called *Ten Years Without Lenin*. Themes of the Civil War and the successes of the young Red Army were depicted in a good many of the issues. One such design shows Stalin arriving at the 1st Cavalry Army and addressing the soldiers of the Tsaritsyn front. Among the great men in Russian history, art and literature, are: the great Russian scholar, Mikhail Lomonosov; the first printer of books in Russia, Ivan Fyodorov; the generals, Alexander Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov; the writers Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky; the composers Pyotr Chaikovsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and the painters Ilya Repin and Vassili Surikov.

The years of peaceful labour of the Stalin five-year plans found reflection in several pre-war issues bearing drawings of Magnitogorsk blast furnaces; the great Dnieper Power Station, Moscow underground stations, and collective farm fields.

With the war, came stamps with images of Soviet people defending their country. Here is a blue one with a group of Home Guards—another, showing a mother seeing her son off with the words: "Be a Hero" and a third: a white-haired partisan shooting at some fascists. Some two hundred stamps were issued during the war years dedicated to episodes of the greatest war in the history of mankind. One series in uniform style was designed in honour of heroic towns: Leningrad, Stalingrad, Sevastopol and Odessa. Portraits of heroes of the Patriotic War form another series—the pilot Nikolai Gastello, the girl partisan Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, the young heroes of the town of Krasnodon. Another large series represents the Orders and medals inaugurated during the war, and there is a special stamp in honour of Victory Day. All the designs are the work of famous painters and etchers.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Soviet postage stamp was marked by two new designs.



Soviet mountain climbers

The figures 1009 and 1010 marking these latest additions to the series of Soviet stamps are evidence that one thousand and ten specimens of postage stamps have been issued in the Soviet Union within the last quarter of a century.

SUMMER IN THE MOUNTAINS

Splendid achievements were made by Soviet alpinists during the summer season of 1946. An expedition to the Pamirs organized by the Committee for Physical Culture and Sport of the U.S.S.R. made an ascent of Peak Pathore (24,750 feet), the highest summit of the Rushansk Mountain Range. This was a remarkable performance in that the ascent being made by twelve Alpinists at a time, set a world record for a mass ascent of a height exceeding 23,000 feet.

The horses carrying the baggage were unable to go higher than 24,000 feet and the mountaineers had to carry everything themselves the rest of the way.

After four halts the group, making their way up the steep slope of rock and ice, reached a slippery ridge and toiled on to a dome-shaped mountain surface from where the way

to the summit lay along a sheer snow-covered incline.

After a stubborn, fourteen days' effort the record ascent was successfully effected.

In the Caucasus, for the first time in the history of Alpinism, a difficult crossing of the Uzhba, a summit known not only to Soviet, but also to many foreign Alpinists was made. A party, headed by champion sportsman Alexei Malenkov, ascended the slippery snow-covered wall leading from the Uzhba glacier up to the saddle. From here ascent of the northern and southern summits of the Uzhba were made, the party afterwards descending along the Eastern Wall to the Gulsik Glacier.

The performance was a U.S.S.R. record.

Another national record was made by a party of Soviet sportswomen directed by Noskova, who crossed one of the most interesting and difficult summits of Ullu Tau-Chan.

Three record ascents have been made in West Caucasus: the Amanauz ridge, never before crossed by any group of Alpinists; an ascent of the Sufrudjhu summit and, finally, a crossing of Dzhuguturduchat ridge, including the Gtysh summit.

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